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IN TWO VOLUMES.

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MAY.

BY

MRS. OLIPHANT,

AUTHOR OF

"THE MINISTER'S WIFE," ETC.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I. + 2

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BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1873.

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"Maggio
Non ha paraggio."

ITALIAN PROVERB.

TO

THE HONOURABLE CAPTAIN

AND

MEMBERS OF THE ROYAL AND ANCIENT GOLF CLUB OF ST. ANDREWS

(Especially to those among that noble Company whom the Author ventures to call Friends)

THIS BOOK

IS

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M A Y.

CHAPTER I.

THE house of Hay-Heriot had been established at Pitcomlie for more centuries than could easily be reckoned. It was neither very rich nor very great, but it was well connected, and had held itself sturdily above the waves of fate like one of the rocks along its wild coast line, often threatened by rising tides, but never submerged. There had never been any great personages in the family to raise it above its natural level, but neither had there been any distinguished profligates or spendthrifts to pull it down. Most of the lairds had been respectable, and those who were not had never been more than moderately wicked, keeping clear of ruinous vices. The history of the house had been very monotonous, without ups or downs to speak of. In the vicissitudes of the rebellions they had kept clear, being too far south to be seriously compromised; and though a younger son was out in the '45, that did not affect either the character or the circumstances of the family. In short, this was the Hay-Heriot way of sowing its wild oats. Its younger sons were its safety-valve; all that was eccentric in the race

ran into those stray branches, leaving the elder son always steady and respectable, a most wise arrangement of nature.

Thus the house itself derived even profit and glory from the adventurous irregularity of its younger members, while its stability was uninjured. Indian curiosities of all kinds, warlike trophies, and the splendid fruit of those pilferings which are not supposed to be picking and stealing when they are the accompaniments of war, decorated the old mansion on every side. A curiously decorated scimitar, which had been taken from Tippoo Saib, hung over the mantelpiece in the library along with a French sabre from Waterloo, and the shield of a Red Indian barbarically gay with beads and fringes. These were all contributions from the heroic ne'er-do-weels who linked the staidest of households to the tumult and commotion of distant worlds. Sometimes the ne'er-do-weels would cost the head of the house some money, but on the whole the balance was kept tolerably even, and the younger Hay-Heriots conscientiously forbore from leaving orphan children, or other incumbrances, to burden the old house—a considerateness quite unlike the habit of younger sons, which was applauded and envied by many families in the country who had no such exemption.

The present family differed, however, in many respects from the traditions of the race. Thomas Hay-Heriot of Pitcomlie was indeed all that his ancestors had been, an excellent country gentleman, homely in his manners and thrifty in his habits, but

hospitable, charitable, and not ungenerous—a man of blameless life and high character. His brother Charles, however, who, according to all the family rules ought to have been a scapegrace, was not so in the smallest degree, but, on the contrary, as respectable as his elder brother; a man who had never been further than Paris in his life, a Writer to the Signet in Edinburgh; a man of method and order, who had done exactly the same thing at the same hour every day for thirty years, and who was as good as a clock to his servants and neighbours. This is not in general an attractive description of a man, but there was a great deal to be said in Uncle Charles' favour, as the reader who has patience to follow out this history will learn.

The fact that he was Uncle Charles will at once reveal one important part of his life. He had never married, he had always been more or less a member of his brother's household, and now, when age began to creep upon both, lived almost continually in the home of his youth. It was he who sat in the triangular corner of a settee by the fire with a newspaper in his hand, which he was not reading, in the Pitcomlie drawing-room, on a bright March day not very many years ago, in the half hour which preceded luncheon in that orderly house. We are aware that we ought to have afforded a glimpse of Pitcomlie House, before thus dragging the reader head and shoulders into its domestic centre—but after all it is the interior which is the most important, and this is how it looked.

A long room with three large windows opening

upon a lawn, beyond which surged and swelled an often angry and boisterous sea. The fireplace was opposite the central window, and the room had been handsomely furnished forty years before, and bore that air of continuance and use which in itself gives a charm to all human habitations.

It had, however, as all such rooms have, various points of contact with the immediate present, in the shape of low chintz-covered easy-chairs and other modern vanities. Uncle Charles' chimney-corner was formed by placing an arm across the long settee fitted to the wall, thus leaving him a roomy triangular seat at the end, where his lean limbs got all the benefit of the warmth. He was a man of nearly sixty, with scanty fair hair, scarcely touched with grey, a forehead which wrinkled up in folds or smoothed itself miraculously out according to his moods as he talked, and a pair of light yellowish grey eyes with scanty eyelashes, also light in colour, over which he puckered his brows continually, being short-sighted. He was one of the thinnest of men, as light and agile as many a boy, and sat with his long legs crossed in the acutest of angles.

His brother stood with his back to the fire, older by two years, and heavier by at least six stone. He was dressed in grey morning clothes, with boots and leather gaiters, and an atmosphere of the fields and free air about him. Indeed, he had just come in from his home-farm, which he managed very carefully, and by which he proudly declared he had never lost a penny. There was no one else

in the room. The walls were painted gray-green and hung with family portraits. The round table at the east end—for in this part of Scotland everything is spoken of geographically—was laden with books; and in the west end the room blossomed out into a deeply recessed bay window, half veiled with lace curtains, within which stood one easy-chair and small table. This recess, and indeed the air of the place generally, betrayed the habitation of a woman, and one whose tastes and "ways" were very influential—but no woman was present. The aspect of the room was south and west, so that the sharp east wind then blowing outside did not affect so much as might have been feared the temperature within. An east wind in Fife is not always the grey and withering misery it is in other places; under some peculiar modifications of the atmosphere it makes the sea blue and the sky clear, and such was the effect on this particular morning. This it may be imagined was an effect most deeply to be desired at Pitcomlie, which so far, at least, as the drawing-room was concerned, was like a ship at sea, seeing little besides the water; but as the Hay-Heriots had all been, so to speak, born and bred in an east wind, they were more indifferent than most people to its penetrating power.

"I have another letter from Tom," said Mr. Heriot, sighing and raising his arms with his coat tails under them.

"Always wanting something?" said Uncle Charles, with a shrug.

"Well, when all's done and said, he is the first

to be considered," said the laird, with a faint glimmer as of incipient resentment. "It is to him that everything must come; he must carry on the name like his fathers before him. Being a younger son yourself, Charlie, you have your prejudices, as is but natural. Your word is always for the others—never for Tom."

Uncle Charles gave another shrug of his lean shoulders. "Tom cares little for my good word," he said, "and has little need of it. You're quite capable of spoiling your son yourself, so far as I can see, without me to help. The girls are my thought; young men can shift for themselves, and it was always the way of our family to let them; but the girls, Thomas—there's two of them. There's my niece Marjory, as fine a young woman as any in the county—"

"Oh, ay, May; she's the first in your thoughts. But girls are neither here nor there," said Mr. Heriot, "they have their pickle money, more or less, and there's an end of them. What's Marjory to do with money? What can she do at her age—"

"Marry, I suppose, like the rest," said Uncle Charles.

"Marry!" said the father. "I don't see any necessity for my part; she's a great deal better as she is, with you and me."

"That may be or mayn't be," said Uncle Charles; "but at least you are not the man to say so; you married twice yourself."

"And a great deal I have made by it," said Mr. Heriot, with a mixture of complaint and discontent.

"My first wife was an excellent creature, an excellent creature, as you know; but she was taken away from me just when I and the bairns wanted her most. Providence is very queer in some things. Just when May was a growing girl, and Tom at the age when a woman is of use, their mother was taken away. It is not for us to complain, but it's a strange way of acting, a very strange way of acting. I could not take the responsibility of guiding my hinds in such a manner. Well, and then I married poor Jeanie, hoping she would keep everything in order, and set the house to rights—and what does she do but slip away too, poor thing, leaving me with a helpless bit baby on my hands? A great deal I have made by it that you should quote my example. What would Marjory do to marry? She is far better as she is, mistress and more of this house, petted as no husband would ever pet her, getting her own way in everything. Bless my soul, man, what would you like for her more?"

"Well, a house of her own," said Uncle Charles, no way daunted, "and a good man. I have not your experience, Thomas, but I suppose that's the best for a woman. She is more of your way of thinking than mine, but it's our duty to think for her, you know. We're old now, and Tom's extravagant—and she's not precisely growing younger herself."

"Toots, she's young enough," said the laird; and then he began to walk up and down the room, still with his coat-tails under his arms. "To tell

the truth," he said, "Marjory's marriage would be the worst thing that could happen for us. I would not stand in her way if it was for her good. When there's a family of daughters, of course it becomes of consequence; what else can they do, poor things? but Marjory is in a very different position. Poor little Milly is not ten, and what would you and I do, left in a house like this, with a bit creature of ten years old? Her sister is her natural guardian; and what can be more natural than that May should take care of her father's house and keep everything going? What can a woman want more? A house of her own! isn't this house her own? and as nice a house as any in Fife; and as for a man—if she knew as much about men as I do, Charlie, or you either for that matter—"

Uncle Charles gave a half-stifled, chuckling laugh. The humour of this remonstrance overcame his graver sense; and that Marjory's marriage would have been as great a drawback—perhaps a greater misfortune—to himself than even to her father there could be no doubt.

'I don't say but what that's an indisputable argument," he replied; "she might get a bonny bargain, and repent it all her days. But there's the luncheon bell, and where is she? I don't think I ever knew her to be late before."

"Are you not going to wait?" said the laird.

Mr. Charles had hoisted himself up at the sound of the bell; he had folded his newspaper and laid it down upon his seat. He had picked up his short-sighted spectacles, which lay as they always did,

when he was reading, on the edge of the wainscot, which was high and served him as a stand; and he had lifted the poker to administer, as he invariably did at this hour, a farewell poke to the fire before leaving it. He turned round upon his brother, looking at him over his shoulder with the poker in his hand.

"Wait!" he said. It was altogether a new idea. Marjory was punctuality itself, trained to it from her earliest years, and time was inexorable at Pitcomlie, waiting for no man or woman either. "Wait?" he repeated, laying down the poker. "Thomas, my man, you're not well."

"Bah!" said the laird, taking up the poker which his brother had dropped, and applying such a blow to the coal as sent blazing sparks all over the hearth-rug. It was exactly what might have been expected, but his brother stood helplessly and looked at him, feeling that chaos itself had come, until the smell of the burning wool startled them both. Mr. Heriot stooped down, which did not agree with him, to pick up the smouldering sparks with his hands, out of which the morsels of fire tumbled again, sprinkling little pin-points of destruction all over the Turkey rug. Mr. Charles ran and opened the window, which let in a steady strong blast from the Firth, enough to wither up the very soul of any man not to the manner born. "Bless my soul!" they both said, between the fire and the cold, in confusion and discouragement. It was entirely Marjory's fault. Why was not Marjory at home? What did she mean by staying out at an hour when she was so

much wanted? Mr. Heriot spoke quite sharply when old Fleming, the butler, came to answer the bell. "Where is Miss Marjory?" he said. "Come and pick up these cinders, and don't stand and stare at me. Where is Miss Marjory, I ask you? What do you mean by ringing the bell when she's not here?"

"Lord bless us, Sir," said old Fleming, gazing at his master with a consternation beyond words. "What for should I no ring the bell? I've rung it night and morning, midday and dinner-time, in a' times and seasons, even when there was death in the house; and what for should we hold our peace now?"

"Confound you!" said the laird; and then he recollected himself, and put on that peculiar politeness which is with some men a symptom of wrath. "Be so good as to leave the room at once, and bring me word if Miss Marjory has come in," he said.

Mr. Charles by this time had closed the window, subdued by his brother's unusual fractiousness. "Tom's letter must have been more trying than ordinary," he said to himself, and then in the curious pause that followed he looked at his watch. A quarter to two o'clock! In the memory of man it had not been known that the Pitcomlie household should be later than half-past one, in sitting down to its luncheon. Mr. Charles did not know what to do with himself. In his scheme of existence this half hour, and no other, was filled with lunch. He had other duties for all the other half hours, and

every one of them must be pushed out of its proper place by May's singular error. This fretted him more than he could say. He walked about the room with his hands in his pockets and in much bewilderment of soul. "If you will not come, I will go by myself," he said at length to his brother, "I can't afford to lose all my afternoon. May must have stayed in Comlie with old Aunt Jean for lunch."

"Lose your afternoon!" said Mr. Heriot. "Bless my soul, what's your afternoon, an idle man! If it had been me that had complained"—

"There's Scotch collops," said old Fleming, suddenly appearing at the door, "and chicken with cucumber. They'll both spoil if they're no eaten; and Miss Marjory's not to be seen, no even from the towerhead where I sent little James to look. You'll do her little good waiting, if I may make so bold to say so, and the good meat will be spoiled."

"I told you so," said Mr. Charles, who profited by this interruption to march briskly past Fleming and hasten to the dining-room. Mr. Heriot followed him with a less satisfied air; and the two gentlemen placed themselves at table, and being hungry eat a hearty meal and said no more about Marjory. Her absence indeed was nothing to be anxious about, and the chicken and cucumber was very good, as were also the Scotch collops, a dish for which Mrs. Simpson, the cook, was famous. Mrs. Simpson, indeed, was famous for a great many things; she was partly the creation and partly the instructress of Mr. Charles Hay-Heriot himself to whom she

had been solemnly bequeathed by one of his old friends in Edinburgh, who had bragged of her greatly in his lifetime, and had meant to survive her, and publish her lore in a book. But it was she who had survived instead, and Mr. Charles was of opinion that he himself had immensely improved her. She was supposed to be the last depositary of many old Scotch recipes, the only person who knew how to send up Friar's chicken, and a how-towdie with drappit eggs. The Scotch collops were brown and fragrant, sending a delicious flavour through all the house, and the little momentary annoyance of the past half hour sank into insignificance before them. The two gentlemen made a hearty meal, both of them having had fresh air enough to make it acceptable, and talked of other things. With Fleming behind his master's chair, even Tom's letter became no matter for discussion, and though the table with its two vacant places looked somewhat dreary, there was no further remark made on that subject. "They are dining with old Aunt Jean," Mr. Charles said to himself; and as for his brother he was a little ashamed of the fuss he had made. That fuss had not been, as he very well knew, for Marjory's absence, but because Tom's letter was such a one as irritates a parent; and Mr. Charles' readiness to side against Tom in all domestic controversies irritated the father still further, who did not choose that any one but himself should blame his heir. Indeed one of Mr. Heriot's chief grievances against his eldest son was this way he had of laying himself open to animadversion. He felt it was

against the dignity of all eldest sons and heads of houses that this should be possible. The Charlies of life, the younger sons, the girls, were open to reasonable discussion; but when the heir thus exposed himself, all family discipline and subordination was in danger. It was almost as bad as if he himself, Thomas Hay-Heriot of Pitcomlie, had been openly criticised by his family. And Tom was a young man who continually laid himself open to animadversion. Even Fleming had been known to have his fling at him, and the only one of Marjory's revolutionary qualities which really annoyed her father, was her want of proper respect for her brother's position. He had been the eldest son himself, and had always been treated with the highest consideration; and the head of the house entertained very strongly this *esprit de corps*. He made no further allusion therefore to the subject which really engrossed all his thoughts.

CHAPTER II.

While her father and uncle were thus fuming over her absence, Marjory Hay-Heriot, with her little sister, had been making her way quietly about the little town of Comlie, whither they had ridden down in the morning, tempted by the sunshine, after some days of rainy weather. Comlie was a little old clean and quaint place, an old-fashioned Fife borough, devoted to fishing in its lower parts, but possessing such a High Street as not one of all its sister-towns possessed. This High Street had a wide causeway, clean and straight, and a broad footpath into which many old-fashioned large houses stepped forward with their white gables, in a true picturesque old Scotch way, telling of better times and characteristics more decided than our own. A quaint little semi-metropolitan air was about this silent street, through which the broad sunshine fell with few shadows to obstruct it. A little town-hall with a quaint ancient steeple stood in the middle of the street, with one square unglazed window protected by iron rails, the window of the town Bridewell, raised just above the heads of the passers-by, and looking as like the little town prison of an Italian mountain village as two similar things could look in places so unlike. At the west end was an old inn, a little hostel which, no doubt, was doing

a good trade in the days when queens and courts were at Falkland Palace, and archbishops reigned in St. Andrews. The houses on the south side of the street with their projecting gables, whitewashed and many-windowed, looked out upon the sea to the back, over the fringe of fisher cottages which lay lower, close to the beach. At the east end of the town stood the church, an old church cobbled into mediocrity, but still displaying to instructed eyes the lines of its original structure, and tempting archæologists with hopes of restoration. It was surrounded by a churchyard full of monuments of the sixteenth century, with skulls and cross-bones and urns and puffing cherubs. It is astonishing how many dead people belonging to that century could afford to leave behind them those cumbrous masses of stone. The Manse, a solid, and in its way, spacious square stone house, stood at a little distance overlooking the sea; and outside the church gates, where the broad street had widened into a kind of triangular *place*, there were several "genteel" houses—one decorated with iron gates and trees in front, but the rest old, of characteristic Fife architecture, each with its white gable. The sea is the background to everything in this country, and to-day it was blue, a keen and chill, but brilliant tone of colour, throwing up the whitewashed houses and light grey stone with a brightness almost worthy of Italy; though no Italian wind, unless, indeed, a Tramontana fresh from the snowy hills, ever penetrated human bones like that steady blast from the east, which came natural to the people of Comlie.

Marjory had left her horse and little Milly her tiny pony at John Horsburgh's inn, and they were now going up and down the silent street in the sunshine about their various businesses, holding up their riding-skirts, the little girl keeping very close by her sister's side like a little shadow, and communicating with the outer world almost exclusively by means of a large pair of limpid blue eyes, clear as heaven, and wide open, which said almost all that Milly had to say, and learned a great deal more than Milly ever betrayed. Wherever Marjory went, this little shade went with her, sometimes holding by her dress, always treading in her very footsteps, a creature with no independent existence of her own, any more than if she had been part of Marjory's gown, or an ornament she wore. As for Marjory herself, she went along the street of Comlie with the free yet measured step of a princess, aware that every eye in the place (there were not many visible), was turned to her; but so used to that homage that it gave her only a fine backing of moral strength and support, and made her neither vain nor proud. Vain! why should Marjory Hay-Heriot be vain? She knew her position exactly and accepted it, and was aware of all its duties, and considered it natural. She was like a princess in Comlie; she would have told you so simply without more ado, as calm in the consciousness as any young grand-duchess in her hereditary dominions. She had been going over her kingdom that morning, and had found a great many things to do.

At this moment when, if the reader pleases, we

shall join ourselves like little Milly to her train, she was coming up from "the shore" as it was called, the fisher-region, where she had been paying a sorrowful visit. One of the boats had gone down in the last gale, a too frequent accident, and a young widow with a three months old baby, a poor young creature who not two years before had left Pitcomlie House to marry her Jamie, was sitting rocking herself and her child in the first stupor of grief, and replying by monosyllables to all the kindly attempts to console her.

"Oh ay, Miss Marjory," "I ken that," "Yes, Mem, its a' true," poor Jean had said, with the weary assent which means so little. Marjory came back to the High Street with a grave face, and her own mind full of the dreariness of that inevitable assent. What could any woman answer more to the kind voices that bid her bear her trial and have patience, and remember that it is God's will? "Its a' true." May was not of a melancholy mind; but that pitiful assent to everything she had said went to her heart. She walked on with her light step that did no more than *effleurer* the ground, stopping sometimes to nod and smile to some woman at her door.

"All well to-day, Mary?"

"Oh, ay, Miss Marjory, just about our ordinary, nae mair to complain o' than maist puir folk; if thae weary cauld winds would bide away that gie us a' our death."

"This is the first east wind we've had for a fortnight," said Marjory. "I think we have very little reason to complain."

"Ye see I'm frae the south," said the woman; "and my man has a hoast that drives ye wild to hear; and when we havena the east wind in Comlie we have the rain, and the bairns canna gang to the school, and there's naething but dirt and wet, and misery and quarrelling. It's a weary world, as our grannie says. Whatever the Almighty sends, there's aye something folk would like better."

"But perhaps that might be the folk's fault, and not the Almighty's," suggested Marjory.

"Maybe; I'm no saying," answered Mary Baxter, cautiously. "I hope's a' weel at Pitcomlie, and good news o' the young gentlemen. They tell me Mr. Charles's wife out in India yonder, has another son. Bless us! and I mind himself so well, a curly-headed laddie! It would have been mair like the thing if Mr. Tammas would settle down, and bring hame some bonnie young leddy and gie Mr. Heriot childhers' childher, as it's in the Bible. But there's nae word o' that that I can hear?"

"No, there is no word of that. I hope Nancy is doing well in her new place," said Miss Heriot, changing the subject with the same unconscious artifice which had prompted her humble interlocutor to carry the war into the enemy's country by introducing Charles's marriage and Tom's bacherlorhood. These two subjects were not pleasing to the house of Heriot; for Tom, the heir, unfortunately, showed no inclination to marry at all, and Charlie in India had become a husband and a father much too soon, contrary to all traditions. Marjory passed on when she had been satisfied on the subject of Nancy, but

was stopped a few steps further on by a bareheaded girl in a pretty pink short-gown, the costume of the country, who ran after her with her fair locks falling loose in the wind.

"Eh, Miss Marjory, would you come in and speak to my mither?" cried this new applicant. This was Jenny Patterson, who lived up a stair just behind the Tolbooth, and a little out of Miss Heriot's way. How Jenny admired the young lady as she gathered up her heavy cloth skirts, and with a smile and a nod went on to the well-known door! If Jenny had ever heard of goddesses, just so would she have impersonified a feminine divinity; that mixture of splendid superiority and familiar kindness being of all things the most captivating to the unsophisticated soul. Jenny's brother, who was a watchmaker in Dundee, and held very advanced political opinions, considered her devotion servile, but blushed to feel that he himself shared it whenever he was brought under the same influence. "But it's no the leddy, it's the woman I think of," Radical Jock explained to himself—an explanation as false as most such explanations are.

"Jenny says you want me, Mrs. Patterson," said Marjory, sitting down on the chair which Jenny carefully dusted and placed in front of the fire. It was a small room, with but a little space between the bed and the fire, and with one window veiled by an immense geranium stretched upon a fan-like frame, which was the pride of its mistress's heart, consumed half the air and light in the little place, and curiously enough condescended to grow with

splendid luxuriance. Jenny's mother was an invalid, but a good needlewoman, who got through a great deal of "white-seam" in her chair by the fire, and lived, she, her daughter, and her geranium on the earnings thus acquired, supplemented by help from her sons. Jenny stood by smiling and open-mouthed, twisting up the hair which invariably came down when she flew out into the street on any errand; and little Milly, familiar to the place, actually took the independent step of going to the window, and chirruping to the canary which hung above that geranium forest, and was the best singer in all Comlie, not even excepting the Minister's bullfinch, a strange and foreign bird.

"Dinna think I'm wanting anything from you, Miss Marjory. The worst o' puir folk is that they're aye wanting. Na, na, it was only for a sight o' your face, which does a poor body good, and to read ye my Willie's letter. Jenny, ye taupie, bring me Willie's letter. I can maistly say it off by heart, but Miss Heriot will like to see it, and I might forget something. Eh, I'm a happy woman! The captain o' the 'William and Mary's' dead out yonder (pointing her thumb over her shoulder, which was the way or indicating distance in Comlie), and Willie's to bring the boat home. It's as good as a ship to him; for ance a captain aye a captain, and his owners are no the men to put him back in a mate's place."

"I am very glad to hear of Willie's promotion," said Marjory; "was the captain a Comlie man?"

"Eh, you'll think me awfu' hard-hearted," said

Mrs. Patterson, struck with compunction, and pausing with her large horn spectacles in her hand; "but you canna suppose I would have spoke as free and been as thankfu' if he had been a Comlie man. Na, na, if another house in the town had been mourning I would have held my peace. I've had trouble enough myself to have mair feeling; but he's no frae Comlie nor nearhand. He's a Dundee man, and I ken naething about him. His name was Brown, like mony mair, and he's no even married that I ever heard tell of, and it's to be hoped he's in a better place."

With this the new captain's mother dismissed the old one, and put on her big spectacles. "It's dated Riga, the fourteenth February, for that's the port where they were bound. 'My dear mother, I hope you and Jenny's in good health as this leaves me. Many and many a time I think of you and the cosy little room, and the flower, and the canary-bird—' Bless the laddie," said Mrs. Patterson, stopping abruptly, "he had aye the kindest heart!"

The reader probably, however, will not be so much interested in this letter as Marjory was, who listened and made her comments with thorough sympathy, feeling quite relieved, as was Willie's mother, by the fact that the dead captain was not a Comlie man. Dundee was large and vague, and far away, and was able enough to mourn her own dead. But as they went down the stairs after their visit was over, Marjory said to her little sister, "We shall be too late for luncheon at home; are

you hungry, dear? I think we might go and dine with Aunt Jean."

"I am a little hungry," Milly confessed, not without a blush.

"Then run and tell Betty we are coming, and I will go on to the Manse; you can come after me or stay at Aunt Jean's, as you like."

"Walk slow, May, and I will make up to you," cried little Milly, who ran off instantly like a gleam of sunshine, her long fair hair fluttering in the breeze, anxious to be absent as short a time as possible from her sister's side. Marjory went on slowly making her royal progress through her dominions, casting a smile now and then through the low windows on the ground floor, stopping to nod and say a passing word to some one on an outside stair. The doctor, setting out in his gig on some distant visit, jumped down and crossed the street to speak to her, to ask for Mr. Heriot and Mr. Charles, and tell her how his patients were, of many of whom she had a secondary charge, if not as consulting physician, yet with a responsibility almost as great. "James Tod, poor lad, would be the better of some books," the doctor said, "and you're a better deceiver than I am, Miss Heriot; you might persuade old Mrs. Little that your father has some rare wine in his cellar, wine she could not get to buy."

"You pay me a charming compliment," said Marjory. "Could you not cheat her yourself with all your powers?"

"She laughed in my face," said the doctor, who was young, and not very rich, "and asked me how

I could get finer wines than other folk? She was sure I might spend my siller better. And poor little Agnes dying before my eyes!"

"Will she die?"

"Don't ask me," said the too tender-hearted doctor, springing into his gig again. He was too sensitive to be a doctor, his wife said. As the gig drove away, some one else came up taking off his hat with profound respect. This was young Mr. Hepburn who lived in the house with the iron gates, and was the only unemployed person in Comlie. He was a young man tolerably well off, and more than tolerably good-looking, who had been brought up in a desultory way, was more accomplished than any other individual within twenty miles, did not in the least know what to do with himself, and was treated by Marjory with mingled kindness and condescension, as a clever schoolboy is sometimes treated by a young lady. For his part, Hepburn admired Marjory as he had never admired anyone else in his life. He was three or four years her junior, and he thought he was in love with, nay, adored her. The sight of her he said was as sunshine in the dreary silent place; and he had said this so often that it had come to Marjory's ears. It was not very original, and she had thought it impertinent, and treated him with more lofty condescension than ever.

"Oh, Mr. Hepburn," she said holding out her hand to him; "I did not know you were here. Some one told me you had gone abroad. I should have asked you to come to us sometimes at Pit-

comlie, and bring your music, had I known. Not that we are very lively—"

"Pitcomlie is a great deal better than lively," said the young man. "I am not of such a frivolous mind as to be always looking for amusement. You know, Miss Heriot, how glad I am always to be there."

"But amusement is a very good thing," said Marjory. "Indeed, it is bad for young people to be without it. When Milly is a little older, I intend to make papa give balls and be very lively. I have always thought it a most essential part of training. I hope you go on with your music, and practice as much as you used to do?"

"I don't practice at all in the ordinary sense of the word," said young Hepburn, with an annoyance he could not conceal. Marjory had Scotch prejudices and many old-fashioned notions, and it was her conviction that a man with an immortal soul who "practised" three or four hours a day was a phenomenon to be looked on with something like contempt. Girls did it, poor things! not being able to help themselves—but a man! This young woman, though she thought herself enlightened, was a tissue of prejudices, and we do not in the least defend her old world ways of thinking. She sang very sweetly herself, with a voice which was very flexible and true, but only moderately cultivated; and she thought of music as a pleasant thing to fill up stray corners, but not as an inspiration or occupation of life. And when she kindly asked Mr. Hepburn to

come and *bring his music*, what she meant was undoubtedly contempt.

"I don't mean to use any word I ought not to use," said Marjory, with her gracious smile, "but I hope you keep it up, that and your drawing. It is good to have such resources when one has only a quiet life to look forward to. Of course a gentleman has many ways of occupying himself; but I am so sorry my education has been neglected. When I am dull, there is scarcely anything I can do but read."

"I should not think you were ever dull," said Hepburn, with adoring looks.

"Not very often, just now; but some time probably I shall be, and then I shall envy you your resources. Will you dine with us at Pitcomlie tomorrow, Mr. Hepburn? I fear we shall be quite alone; but if you will take the trouble to come—and bring your—"

"I will come with the greatest pleasure," said the young man, precipitately, drowning that last objectionable request. He would take no music, he vowed, for any inducement which might be offered him. His right hand would make an effort to forget its cunning. He would give himself up to riding and shooting, and trudge about the ploughed fields in leather gaiters, like her father, and make a boor of himself, by way of proving to her that he was not a schoolboy nor a dilettante. This he vowed to himself as she went on smiling, and little Milly passed him like a gleam of light, rushing after her sister. How unlike these two were to anything else

far or near! Marjory, with her little sister, was like a deep-hearted rose, not full blown, yet perfect—one of those roses which you can look down into, as into a lovely nest of colour and fragrance—with a tiny little bud just showing the pink on the same stem. Young Hepburn had a great deal of superficial poetry about him, and this was the image which came into his mind. Not full blown—keeping the form of a bud, deep, many-folded, odorous as the very soul of Summer. That was the similitude which best expressed Marjory Heriot to his mind.

And she, laughing softly at him, wondering to herself what God could mean by making such men, deciding within herself that he would have made a nice sort of girl, pleasant and rather loveable, went on to the Manse, which indeed had been her destination all along.

CHAPTER III.

THE minister of Comlie was an old man who had held that appointment for a great many years. In many respects he was like a traditional Scotch minister, but in others he did not come up to that ideal. He had baptized the entire body of his parishioners, and married a great many of them, but he was not the genial, kindly old soul who is ordinarily conceived of as filling that position. When he walked through the town the children did not run after him, nor seek sweetmeats in his pockets. Any boy or girl in Comlie who had entertained that fond delusion would have been fixed to the earth by the Doctor's frown, and repented, all his or her life after, the profane thought and word. Dr. Murray was a man addicted to literature, full of Biblical criticism, great in exegesis—a man who had been Moderator of the Assembly, and thus reached the highest honour of which the incumbent of a Scottish parish is capable. After this a great calm in respect to distinctions and worldly advantages had been visible in him—he had contemned them gently with a benevolent superiority. His spirit had been, as indeed it ought to have been, in a professional point of view, rather that of Solomon than of Alexander; no new world to conquer had occupied his thoughts, but only a sense of that completion and

fulness which must always be more or less sad. The thing that hath been is that which shall be, he said. He had everything the world could give him, and now there was no more to wish for. But this sense of having attained the highest honour that earth could afford, if somewhat depressing, had also a great deal of satisfaction in it. No doubt his career was over, and all its splendour and majesties were among the things that had been; but yet he had the profound and tranquillizing conviction that he had not lived in vain. Not in any way had he lived in vain. He had written the article on Hyssop in the Encyclopædia Britannica, and he had had a large share in the Popular Commentary on the Bible, which was considered the very best authority upon Eastern customs and geography, and the local peculiarities which throw light upon the sacred text. His name was one of those which had been connected from the very first with the "Christian Herald," and it was he who wrote all the articles, signed Alpha, in that well-conducted magazine. Therefore it will be at once perceived that his life had been well worth living, that he was not in any respect an unsuccessful man, and that the evening of his days might well breathe forth a certain gentle satisfaction. Comlie was very proud of the doctor, and even Fife was proud of him. When he heard that Marjory was in the drawing-room, he laid down the book he was reading and put a marker in it, and after five minutes or so had elapsed—for it did not suit his dignity to make any hasty movements—he left his library to see the

young lady whom he felt a great interest in, as he always said. "She has too much imagination and a hasty mind that runs away with her sometimes; but she has fine instincts," he would say. The Manse stood on a knoll, and the drawing-room faced the sea. It was an old-fashioned room, with small windows set in the deep walls, and furniture which was somewhat dark and solemn. "You'll stay and take a bit of dinner with us, May, now you're here," Mrs. Murray was saying as the doctor came in. "It's no often we get a sight of you, and there's nobody the Minister likes so well to see. Milly, my dear, take off your hat, and tell Margaret, the table-maid, to get out some of the apple-puffs you're aye so fond of. Marjory likes them too."

"But, dear Mrs. Murray, we are going to Aunt Jean," said Marjory. "I will come back another day. Now the weather is mending, I shall be often in Comlie. We are all very well, Doctor, thank you, but wondering not to see you. Uncle Charles has some great argument, which, he says, he keeps in his pocket ready for you. I don't know what it is about. I thought perhaps you would come up quietly to dinner to-morrow, and then you could have it out?"

"We'll do that, my dear," said Mrs. Murray briskly; but the doctor was more formal in his ways.

"Mr. Charles is no contemptible antagonist," he said; "it will be our old question about mortifications. I know I am on the unpopular side, but a man who has convictions must make up his mind

to that sometimes. Did you say to-morrow? I do not remember what engagements I have, but if Mrs. Murray says so——"

"Hoots, doctor, you've no engagements," said lively little Mrs. Murray; "you forget you're at home in Comlie, and no in Edinburgh, where, to my tribulation, we go out to our dinner every night. You may laugh, but it's no laughing matter, May, my dear, and a destruction to my best gown—no to say to all my habits. You may wear point lace when it's dirty, but point lace is too good for a poor Minister's wife, and my suit of Mechlin is as black as if I had swept the chimney in it; and as for working a stocking, or doing any rational thing after one of their late dinners! But we'll come to you, my dear."

"I am afraid we are going to have a storm," said the doctor; "the wind is blowing strong up the Firth, and I doubt we'll have a dirty night. Nothing will teach these fishers to be careful when they're getting what they think a good haul. I have a great mind, when I see the glass falling and the wind rising, to send old Tammas to ring the church bells and warn their boats."

"And why not do it?" said Marjory, with a slight start which was peculiar to her when she heard anything that roused her interest. "There could not be a better use for church bells. Do it, doctor! If the men knew, it might save some of these poor fellows. Poor Jamie Horsburgh, for instance; I saw Jean to-day, and it almost broke my heart."

"Her that was laundry-maid at Pitcomlie?" said Mrs. Murray. "Ah, poor thing! and what she is to do to gain her bread with that bit infant of hers? But I do not advise you, doctor, to set any new-fangled plan agoing for ringing the bells. Nobody would pay any attention. They would say: 'What does the minister know about the weather? Let him bide at his books, and leave the winds to us.' That's what they would say. And if you take my opinion, I cannot but think they would have justice on their side."

"I will not risk it, my dear," said the doctor; "they are a pig-headed race, like all the partially educated. I wish there was a higher standard of education in our schools. Reading and writing are very well, but a little attention to the common phenomena of the elements would be a great matter—as I said to Mr. Tom the last time he was here—"

"Speaking of your brother Tom," said Mrs. Murray briskly; "what is this I hear about Charlie? A second boy, and him not above two years and a-half married! My certy, but they're losing no time; and I hope both doing well?"

"Oh yes," said Marjory, with a shade of indifference stealing over her face; "people always do well in those circumstances, don't they? Fancy our Charlie with a family of children about him! I think it spoils a young man. It makes them grandfatherly—not to say grandmotherly—and knowing about domestic matters. Charlie, of all people in

the world! but it cannot be helped, or put a stop to, I suppose?"

"Whisht, my dear, whisht; that's a strange thing for a woman to say."

"Is it?" said Marjory, with a sudden blush. "What I meant was that the thought of Charlie turned into an old wife—Charlie knowing all about nurseries, and what to give a baby when it has a cold—is so very queer. I don't like it; Charlie was always my pet brother. Poor fellow! and he so far away!"

"I have no doubt he's very happy—as he ought to be with a nice wife and two bonnie bairns," said Mrs. Murray, a little annoyed at Marjory's anti-matrimonial views; but this remark passed unnoticed in the doctor's question about what she was reading, which changed the character of the conversation. Mrs. Murray was not booky, as she herself said; she was too old for anything but novels; and though she had great enjoyment of these on a wet afternoon, by the fireside, or when the doctor was busy with his sermon, she did not say much about them, and kept them in the background with a certain sense of weakness. Marjory, on the contrary, discussed her reading with some eagerness, while the old lady and little Milly cooed and whispered to each other in the background; the child's fair hair pressed lovingly against the net border—white and softly plaited—of Mrs. Murray's cap. And so long was the discussion carried on that Marjory at last sprang up suddenly and held out her hand in alarm to take leave, when the bell

rang for the early dinner, which reminded her how time was passing.

"Aunt Jean will be waiting for us," she cried, with a compunction which was quickened by the well-known tradition of punctuality which distinguished the Hay-Heriots.

"Well, well, my dear, it will do her no harm for once," said Mrs. Murray, going to the door with the visitors, and opening it for them with her own hands. She came out to the step to see them on their way, while her husband stood behind. "Be sure you don't sit too long with Miss Jean—for there's a storm coming up, as the doctor says; and come soon back again," said the old lady, smiling and waving her hand, while her cap-strings wantoned in front of her in the rising wind. "That lassie has strange notions," she said, as she came in and shut the door. "I wish I saw her with a good man and bairns of her own."

"She's a fine girl," said the doctor, turning along the passage to his dressing-room, to wash his hands before dinner. These words did not at all resemble in sense the other expression of applause, "a fine woman"—which they resemble in sound. Dr. Murray did not mean to imply that he found May "fine" in physical development—*belle femme*, as the French say, with a similar signification. He meant that she was delightful, charming, the best specimen he knew of everything a young woman should be.

We are obliged to confess, however, that it was with a somewhat undignified precipitation that the

two sisters crossed the wide street to the dwelling-place of their old aunt. Miss Jean Hay-Heriot was grand-aunt to the younger generation. Her father, the Laird of Pitcomlie, was grandfather of the present Laird: but as she had been the youngest of her family, she was scarcely ten years older than her nephew. She had lived in this gabled house for five and forty years, since the time when, still a young woman, she had given up the world in disgust, after five or six years of wandering in places where lone ladies resort to—Bath, and Cheltenham, and Harrowgate—for in those days it had not become the custom to go abroad. Five and forty years! What a waste of time to look back upon, and what a monotonous, unfeatured expanse, May thought, who sometimes pondered over her old aunt's fate as one chapter among many of the phenomena of feminine existence. But to Miss Jean this waste of years was not so unfeatured as to her young relative. There seemed no reason why she should not go on for ever in the same active yet tranquil way. From her window in the gable she superintended all that Comlie did, every stranger who came into it (they were not many), all the mild visiting that took place among the higher classes, and the family movements of the lower, quarrels, flirtations, marriages, catastrophes of all kinds. She was seated in this same window, when Marjory, a little flushed with haste, hurriedly gathering up her riding-habit, and finding it much in the way, became visible running over from the Manse, Milly close behind, with her long hair

streaming. Miss Jean quietly smiled to herself, and prepared for tempest. It roused her up sometimes, and gave her a pleasant exhilaration, to get an opportunity of setting "that girl of Thomas's" right.

"Quick, quick, Miss Marjory," said Betty, at the door. The door was in the gable, and opened into a square hall, which was underneath the drawing-room. "Quick, like good bairns, and dinna keep your aunty waiting. The broth's ready to come up, and Jessie making a terrible fyke in the kitchen—and Miss Jean's no pleased."

She threw open the door of a little bedroom at the end of the passage as she spoke—it was thought convenient in that region to have sleeping rooms on the ground-floor—and began instantly to take off Milly's outer jacket, which was worn over her long riding-skirt. May smoothed her own hair with a trepidation which was quite unusual to her. It was bright brown hair, not so blond as Milly's, but still full of soft colour, though not red, nor even golden. Her eyes were brown too, large and serious, but capable of lighting up with searching golden gleams. She was softly coloured in every way, with an evanescent bloom that came and went, and the most changeable of faces. Sometimes strangers thought her almost plain, when her upper lip fixed on her lower with the resolute look she sometimes had, and her eyes looked straight before her full of silent thought. But most people who knew Marjory held it impossible that she could ever be plain. She smoothed her hair as best she could,

in her hurry, for those were the days when young ladies were expected to have smooth and shining hair—and put her tall hat and her riding gloves on the table, and pulled out her handkerchief from her bodice. "Am I tidy, Betty; shall I do?" asked, with tremulous accents, the young woman who half an hour before had felt herself princess of Comlie. All these pleasant pretensions failed before the tribunal of Miss Jean.

"Oh, ay, Miss Marjory, you'll do," cried anxious Betty; and attended as ever closely by her little sister, Marjory ran upstairs. Miss Jean sat in the end window, her favourite seat of inspection—and all her "borders," which were of blonde, not so closely put together as those of Mrs. Murray, were quivering round her old face. "So you've come at last, Miss May," she said. "It's a great honour to my humble house, and folk that are gratified with the visits of their betters must be content to wait."

"Oh, Aunt Jean, I am very sorry! We ought to have come here at once, instead of going to the Manse—"

"Far be it from me to say what a young lady like you should do. I'm nothing but an old-fashioned person myself. In my days the young were brought up to obedience and consideration of other folks' ways. But I'm not a learned man like the doctor, nor a whillie-wha like the doctor's wife. I'm of the old Hay-Heriot stock, that always spoke their mind. Betty, bring ben the broth—if our young ladies can sup broth. They

tell me my nephew Charlie has brought a grand cook to the house, far above our old-fashioned Scots dishes."

"Indeed, Aunt Jean, it is the old dishes she is famous for," said May, very conciliatory. "She says she knows nothing about kickshaws, and one of the things I specially wanted was to ask you for the old family receipt for shortbread, which you always promised me, and your particular fish and sauce, which Uncle Charles says is the best he ever tasted."

"I suppose you think you can win me over with your nonsense about fish and sauce," said Miss Jean. "Set Charlie up with his cooks and his newfangled ways! In my days a man ate what was set before him, and said his grace, and was thankful. The mistress of a house, with all her family to provide for, might be excused for giving her mind to it; but, ugh! a man studying what he's to put into his vile stomach! If there's a thing I cannot abide— Dinner's ready! You need not tell me that; it's been ready any time this twenty minutes. You may say to Jess I'm truly sorry for her, but it's our young ladies' way. Go first, bairn, and go quick, for I'll not wait another moment, if it was for the Queen herself."

Thus adjured, Milly ran downstairs, followed by her sister. The old lady brought up the rear, with her big cane. She was a little old woman over seventy, in a large cap with many ribbons and borders of broad blonde, which waved about her withered face as she moved. It was a small face,

much shrivelled up, but lighted with two blazing sparks of light, deeply sunk within the eaves and folds of her eyelids—eyes which could see what happened a mile off, and burn through and through any unfortunate who was subjected to their gaze. She wore a red China crape shawl, very old, but once very richly embroidered and handsome, on her thin shoulders, and her short footstep and the tap of her cane rang through the house as she moved. Everybody within her range increased their exertions, and moved with doubled activity when the tap of Miss Jean's cane became audible.

As for Milly, running on before, her aunt was to her as the exacting, but, on the whole, benevolent fairy who appears in all the tales, who scolded Cinderella, yet gave her the pumpkin coach, and who had drawers upon drawers full of shreds and patches, strings of beads, bright bits of silk, everything that was necessary for the dressing of dolls and making of needlebooks. The pat-pat of the cane seemed part of the old lady to Milly's ear, and she was by no means sure that the cane was not a third leg upon which Aunt Jean moved as ordinary mortals did on the more usual complement. No one except Miss Jean said a word as they sat down to table, and Betty, with a speed and noiselessness, which were born at once of terror and of long practice, served the broth. Milly said they were very good, and asked for a little more of them, without any perception that she was ungrammatical, and as they were hot and savoury Miss Jean mollified by degrees.

"There's one good thing," she said, "that you cannot spoil broth by waiting. That and porridge should always be well boiled. I hope your grand cook knows that among her other accomplishments. But, maybe Milly is above porridge, though her father was brought up upon them, and his father before him, and all the best Scots gentry from the days of Robert Bruce."

"I have a few porridge in a saucer every morning," said Milly, proudly, "and May gives me the rest of the cream after papa's last cup of tea."

"A few in a saucer!" Miss Jean retorted, with renewed vehemence. (N.B. The Scotch reader does not need to be informed that porridge is plural as well as broth.) "I hope, Marjory Hay-Heriot, that you may never have to give a severe account of the way you've brought up that motherless bairn."

"Cream is not immoral, I hope, aunty?" said Marjory, with rising spirit.

"Immoral! Luxury's immoral, indulgence is immoral, and they're immoral that say a word to the contrary," cried the old lady. "Will you tell me that to bring up a fellow-creature to self-indulgence is no a sinful act? But I never understood the ways of this generation, nor do I want to understand them. You're all alike—all alike! from Tom's horse-racing to Milly's saucer of parritch—it is the same thing over again. What you please! and not what's your duty, and the best thing for you in this world and the next. Betty, the boiled beef is too plain for these young ladies.

Bring it to me, and put the chicken before Miss Marjory. A queen may eat a bit of chicken, but the boiled beef's aye good enough for me."

The fact was that the chicken had been added to the meal, expressly for the benefit of Marjory and Milly.

"Bairns are brought up different to what they were in my time," Miss Jean had said to her cook, benevolently, an hour before. "That chucky's young and tender, and they'll like it better than the beef."

But all this kindness had been turned to gall by the unfortunate delay. Milly took this as a simple necessity of nature—rustled a little in her chair, and ate her chicken; but Marjory resented the ungracious reception.

"I am sorry we have come to trouble you, aunt," she said. "I would rather not have anything, thank you; I'm not hungry. The wind is cold, and it has given me a headache. If I might go and sit quiet in the drawing-room, while you finish your dinner, I should get well again."

"The thing for a headache is to eat a meal," said Miss Jean, alarmed. "Bring me the chicken, Betty, till I cut Miss Marjory a bit of the breast. You cannot carve; that's why you want to go away. In my day, carving was part of a lady's education —and cooking too, for that matter. My own mother, as good a woman as ever stepped, took lessons from Mrs. Glass in Edinburgh. I had not that advantage myself, but I know how to divide a chicken. And, Betty, bring in the apple-tart. We'll

all go up to the drawing-room by-and-bye, and before ye go ye shall have a cup of tea."

Thus the storm fell a little, but still continued to growl at intervals; however, when the dinner was over, and May took her place in the square gable, her headache — if she had one — had disappeared. Miss Jean's drawing-room was a curious room, stretching the whole width of the house, and wider at the back than at the other end. The narrower part was the gable. It had an end window looking out upon the street, and one on the east side, from which you could see the line of reddish rocks rounding off towards the point on which stood Pitcomlie; the white mansion-house of the present day shining in the sunshine; the old house, with its high, peaked roof and half-ruined tourelles standing up on the top of the cliff hard by, and the sea breaking in a white line underneath upon the rocks. Though she professed no sentiment, that window which commanded Pitcomlie was dear to Miss Jean's heart.

On the south side of the room was another window, looking straight out upon the sea, from which you could see far off the dim lion couchant of Arthur's Seat, and sometimes a ghostly vision of the Calton Hill, with its pillars, and all kinds of cloudy pageants and phantasmagoria of the elements. It was a grand view, Miss Jean allowed; but she preferred the gable window looking down upon the High Street of Comlie; and here, too, Marjory betook herself instinctively. The Firth, with its splendours, was at her command any day,

but so was not this little centre of humanity. That curiosity about her neighbours and their doings, which was sharp and bitter in Miss Jean, had a warmer development in Marjory, who was young, and thought well of humanity in general; but probably it was the same sentiment. She placed herself on the old-fashioned window-seat, and looked out while she answered all the old lady's questions.

Comlie High Street was very quiet, especially at this tranquil after-dinner hour, when the little world rested after its meal. The children had returned to the school, and such men as had any business to do had gone back to it till the evening. Marjory watched young Hepburn walking up and down slowly, something between a spy and a sentinel, keeping watch, as she very well knew, for her own re-appearance. She smiled with a certain gentle contempt as she watched him, moving slowly across the unbroken light in the still street. What odd fancies boys take into their heads! What good could it do him to wait for her?

When Hepburn disappeared, another figure became visible coming the other way—a man with a clump of his own shadow about his feet, which gradually disengaged itself as he "came east," and stalked along by his side in a portentous lengthened line. The changes of this shadow diverted her as she sat talking to Aunt Jean. "Yes, there had been another letter about Charlie's second baby—a note from Mrs. Charles herself—well, no, not a very nice letter — a consequential little personage, I think,

aunty; as proud of her baby as if it was any virtue of hers." And here Marjory gave a little laugh, not at Mrs. Charles, but at the dark shadow of the man approaching, which lay along the causeway, and moved so, as if it pushed itself along, lying on its side. After she had laughed, Marjory, half ashamed of herself, looked at the man, and saw he was one of the porters from the nearest railway station, and then that he was approaching the house. She raised herself up with a little thrill of —something—yes, surprise, and more than surprise—though probably it was only some parcel for Aunt Jean arrived by the railway, which was ten miles off. By the time he had reached the door, and had knocked heavily with his hand, May was sure that it was a parcel for her aunt, but nevertheless was aware of a little fluttering at her heart.

"Do you often get things by the railway, aunty?" she asked.

"Me get things by the railway? You forget I'm a lone old woman, and no acquainted with all your new-fangled ways. Not me. When I want anything not to be had in Comlie, which is not often, it comes in the boat to Anstruther, as was always our way, and then by the road, or private hand when there's an opportunity. Railway! said she?—What's a' this, Betty?—what's a' this? A letter? Give it to me, you taupie, and make no fuss. Oh! for Miss Marjory! My certy! Miss Marjory's in great request when her letters come following her here."

"Eh, Miss Jean! it's what they call a telegraph —it's come from the railway at Kinnucher, wi' a man and horse. Eh, I'm awfu' feared it's ill news!"

A telegram is always alarming to those who are unfamiliar with such startling messages; and even in these accustomed days there are few women who open one without a tremor. But at the time of which we write, they were unusual and inevitably meant something tragical. Betty stood gaping with excitement and terror, looking on, and Miss Jean let her knitting drop on her knee, and turned her sharp eyes towards her niece, while little Milly, pressing close to her sister, interposed her blond head almost between Marjory and the brief, fated letter. Somehow, as she read it, she felt in the suddenness of the shock a conviction that she had known it all along, mingled with a curious confused self-reproach for the levity of her thoughts about that man's shadow. She read it, and her head seemed to buzz and shoot as if a hundred wheels had started into motion, and then stood still. She looked round at her aunt, as if across a sudden distance at once of time and of space; all the colour fled from her cheeks, and her voice changed like her feelings. "Tom has had a bad accident," she said.

"God bless us! Marjory, you're trying to break it to me quietly; the boy's dead."

"No!" said Marjory, with a slight shiver. "A bad accident; read it, aunty. And, Milly, run quick and get on your things."

Miss Jean, sobered too in a moment, took the terrible missive, which, to her ignorant eyes, looked something diabolical. It was from somebody in England she made out, and was worded with what she felt to be cruel conciseness. "Tom has had a bad accident; thrown from his horse; symptoms dangerous. He wishes you to tell his father; and to come to him at once."

"It may be a lie," said Miss Jean in a low voice, and trembling; "very likely it's a lie. There's no beginning and no ending; and the man, if it is a man, has not signed his name."

"Oh, I know his name; he is one of Tom's friends. It is no lie!" said Marjory. And then she added, trembling too: "Aunt Jean, don't you feel, like me, that you always knew this would be the end?"

"The end! Who's speaking of the end?" cried Miss Jean impatiently; and then, all at once, she fell crying and sobbing. "Oh, poor Thomas, poor Thomas; that was so very proud of his boy! Who's to tell him?"

"Will I run for the Minister?" said Betty, who had come back with Marjory's hat in her hand, the tears streaming down her cheeks, and all the excitement of a great family event in her mind.

"The Minister is the right person to tell the father such ill news," said Miss Jean; "and it's best to have him at hand, whatever happens. Betty, you can run—"

Marjory put up her hand to stop the eager messenger. In spite of herself, even at that moment

of excitement, a vision of Dr. Murray clearing his throat, and preparing his way by a little speech about the vicissitudes of life gleamed before her. She could see him hemming and taking out his handkerchief with a look as tragically important as if he were the chief actor in the scene.

"No!" she said; "not the Minister; send down to John Horsburgh's to get out our horses, Betty. I will tell him myself."

"You're not equal to it, my poor bairn."

"He will take it best from me; and it's Tom's wish," said Marjory, putting on her hat. She felt the tears rising to her eyes; but this was not a moment to let them fall.

"I doubt if Thomas will take it as he ought to take it," said Miss Jean; "he's a good man, but he's always had his own way. Perhaps, as you say, Marjory, it is best to keep it all in the family, for a man's apt to say what he should not say in a sudden trouble. And I'm sorry I was so ill to you about keeping me waiting; what was ten minutes, here or there? Oh May, my bonnie lamb! the eldest son!"

And with this Miss Jean, melted by the bad news into use of the pet name which had scarcely passed her lips since Marjory was a child, gave her niece a sudden embrace, by putting her thin hands on May's two arms, and touching her chin with her own withered cheek. Very seldom was she moved to such an outburst of affection. The wave of her blonde borders across Marjory's face was the most passionate demonstration she was capable of; but

when her nieces had gone, Miss Jean sat down at the window which looked to Pitcomlie, with a genuine ache in her old heart. "Eh, the bonnie laddie he was!" she said to herself; "eh, the stout and strong young man! There never was an heir cut off that I mind of in our family before. But Thomas was aye foolish, very foolish; and many a time I've told him what indulgence would come to. Lord help us all, both living and dying! It's aye a special blessing of Providence, whatever happens, that Marjory's a courageous creature; and that Charlie's babies are both sons."

Thus the old woman comforted herself, who was near the ending of all mortal vicissitude; and Pitcomlie lay fair and calm in the sun, greatly indifferent who might come or go—one or another, what did it matter to the old house, which had outlasted so many generations? what did it matter to the calm world, which takes all individual sorrows so easily? But to some atoms of humanity what a difference it made! How dark the heavens had grown all at once, and how clouded the sun!

Marjory said not a word all the way home, as she rode with her little sister by her side. How they had chattered as they came; and how Milly had called "May! May!" a dozen times in a minute; the prelude of every sentence. Milly kept as close to her sister now as she could, and sometimes stroked her skirt with her little hand and the whip in it, in token of silent sympathy. There was urgent need to reach home; but Marjory did not go fast. It was no easy task she had before her. Her father

was fond of her she knew; perhaps more fond than of either of his sons; but his heir, with all his extravagances, with all his folly and wildness, had been his delight and pride. There are some women who are saved from all the shocks and pains of life; everyone around them instinctively standing forth to protect them, and shield off the blow; but there are some, on the other hand, to whom it comes natural to receive the sharpest and first thrusts of adversity, and blunt the spear in their own bosoms before it penetrates any other. Marjory was one of this class,—a class instantly recognized and put to use by the instinct of humanity. It had seemed natural to Tom to put this duty upon her; natural to Tom's friend to communicate it to her, without any attempt at breaking the news. And she herself accepted her office, simply, feeling it natural too.

CHAPTER IV.

THE house of Pitcomlie lay very still and quiet in the fitful sunshine, when the daughters of the family reached its open door. The door stood always open, unsuspicious, disclosing the way into its most private corners to any comers. It had nothing to conceal. At this hour in the afternoon, it was exceptionally still. The gentlemen were out, the servants all absorbed into their own part of the house, and not a stir nor sound announced the presence of a large household. The brightness of the day was clouded, but yet held its own by moments, the sun coming out now and then with double brilliancy from the edge of the clouds which were driven over its face one by one. As Marjory and her little sister rode up the avenue, one of those great masses of cloud had floated up, and threw a heavy shadow over the house, and the blue broad sea beyond; but as they alighted at the door, the sun burst forth again, blazing upon the wide open doorway.

"Is my father at home, Rob?" asked Marjory of the groom who came to take her horse.

"The laird's out, ma'am, and so's Mr. Charles. They're baith away wast," said Rob, jerking his thumb over his shoulder.

Marjory stood musing on the steps before she would go in; she did not know whether to seek her father "away wast," or to wait for him. How still the house was, so unsuspecting, so serene and peaceful! It seemed treacherous to go into it with a secret so deeply affecting its existence in her hands. Somehow it seemed to Marjory's excited fancy that she was about to give a blow without warning, without preparation, to some one whose smiling unalarmed countenance looked trustfully up at her. It seemed a treachery even to know it, and above all to go on knowing it, keeping the secret, into the old gentle family house that feared nothing. When she went upstairs she changed her dress, and gave her maid instructions to pack a few necessaries for her.

"My brother has met with an accident," she said, as calmly as she could.

To say it even in this form relieved her mind. She did not feel such a traitor to the kindly old house.

Mr. Heriot fortunately came back as soon as her preparations were made, and now the worst part of her duty was to come. She ran down and met him at the door.

"What made you so late, May?" he said, his face brightening involuntarily at sight of her.

"I was detained," she said; and came out and loitered in front of the door, playing with the dogs, who always accompanied him. He was as unsuspicious as his house. If he had been anxious in the morning, he had thrown his anxieties off. He pointed out to his daughter the good points of a

pointer puppy, which, large-limbed and imbecile, came roving round from the stables, scenting the arrival of the others.

"He'll make a grand dog before September," he said, "when he's grown and trained. Tom will be delighted with him."

May interrupted him hastily, for she was choking with the news.

"Come round to the cliff, papa, there is a storm brewing," she said.

Unsuspicious, he went with her. They took what Mr. Heriot called "a turn" round the soft lawn which surrounded that side of the house. It was too much exposed for flowers or even shrubs, but green and smooth as velvet. The sea dashed with a muttering suppressed roar on the beach beneath. It was of a steely blue, sometimes flashing in the gleams of sunshine, sometimes leaden under the shadow. Towards the east, on the very angle of the coast, stood the old mansion house, tall and narrow, with its tourelles—all but one tower, which adjoined the present house, was ruinous and roofless—but it was draped by branches which burst out from the broken walls, and a wild luxuriance of ivy. The existing house stood lower, and looked warm, and peaceful, and safe, like the present under the protection of the past. Marjory and her father made their turn round and round, she talking against time, not knowing how to introduce her subject. At last, as they turned to come back, she pointed out to him one of those sudden dramatic changes of the clouds.

"Look, papa, how quickly the lights change. It was in sunshine just now, and how black everything is already! It makes one feel eerie. It is like a cloud of misfortune enveloping the old house."

She was foolishly in hopes that he would have taken up this metaphorical strain, and thus given her an opening to say what she had to say.

"Nothing more natural, my dear," said Mr. Heriot. "The clouds are driving up from the mouth of the Firth. It's an ill sign when they come and go so fast. I hope those foolish fellows from Comlie shore will be warned in time."

"Oh, papa," cried Marjory, seizing this opening. "It is dreadful to think how seldom we are warned in time! How we go on to the very edge of a precipice, and then—"

"Phoo!" said Mr. Heriot, "if a man does not keep a look-out before him, it's nobody's fault but his own."

Thus the door was shut upon her again. She looked at him with a kind of despair, and put both her hands round his arm.

"Papa," she said, "I think we have had a very tolerably happy life—nothing very much to find fault with. Everything has gone on comfortably. We have had no great troubles, no misfortunes to speak of—"

"I don't know what you call misfortunes," said her father. "That affair of the Western Bank was anything but pleasant."

"It was only money, papa."

"Only money! What would you have, I should

like to know? *Only* money! May, my dear, to be a sensible girl as you are, you sometimes speak very like a haverel. Loss of money is as great a misfortune as can befall a family. It brings a hundred other things in its train—loss of consideration, troubles of all kinds. Personal losses may hurt more for the moment, but so far as the family is concerned—"

"Oh, don't say so," cried Marjory. "Papa, I am afraid there are things that hurt a great deal more. I have heard—something about Tom—"

"What about Tom?" he said, turning upon her with an eagerness much unlike his former calm.

"It may not perhaps be so bad as appears. He has had—an accident," she said, breathless and terrified.

To her surprise, the anxiety in her father's face calmed down.

"An accident! is that all?" he said, with a long-drawn breath of relief.

"All! papa!"

"Well, well," said Mr. Heriot, half-impatiently, "you think I've no feeling. You are mistaken, May. But that boy, that brother of yours, has been in worse scrapes—scrapes that no doctor could mend. However, that's not the question. How did you hear? and when did it happen? and what is it? Arm, or leg, or collar-bone? I know how lads lame themselves. Hunting is all very well in moderation, but these young men pay dear for it. They think no more of breaking a limb than if it was the branch of a rotten tree."

"But, papa, I am afraid it is, perhaps, more serious than you think," faltered Marjory, half rendered hopeful by his ease, half frightened by indifference.

"Never fear," said Mr. Heriot; "women always think worse of such things than they deserve. Tom's not the lad to come to harm that way. It's long or the de'il dee at a dykeside."

Then a moment of silence followed. She felt as if her tongue clove to the roof of her mouth. She was bewildered by her father's strange levity. She strolled round the cliff slowly, as if she were in a dream, not feeling sure for one dizzy moment whether her senses might not have deceived her, whether the telegram might not be some mere delusion and her father right. He was so confident and easy in his confidence—and surely on these kind of subjects, at least, he must know better than she did. But then, to be sure, it was not on her judgment the matter rested. It was Tom's friend who had communicated news which nobody's opinion could change; and already the lights were lengthening and the afternoon passing away.

"Papa, you will not mind my going to him," she said, hurriedly. "He wishes it; he has sent for me. And I wish very much to go at once."

"He has sent for you?"

"For all of us. He says, 'Tell my father—' I fear, I fear, he must be very bad. Oh! my poor Tom, my poor Tom!"

"You are talking nonsense," said her father, letting her hand drop from his arm with a certain

impatience. "Tom might have known better than to make such an appeal to you. Where is he? And if he were so very bad how could he have written? Phoo, phoo, May; this fuss and nonsense is not like you."

"It is not my doing," she cried. "Oh! papa, look, the afternoon is flying away, and we shall lose the train."

He looked up at the sky as she did, and somehow this practical reference seemed to alarm him more than all she had said. In the bright, slanting sunshine which suddenly burst upon him at this moment, his face paled as suddenly as if some evil breath had passed over it.

"The train! I did not think of that. You can order the carriage if you like," he said. "It is nonsense; but I will put some things into a bag, if I must be foolish and go with you on a fool's errand—"

"Your things are all ready, papa; I have seen to everything. If we do not miss the train—"

"I will go round to the stables myself," he said; and then he turned upon her with a forced smile. "Mind, I think it a fool's errand—a fool's errand; but to please you, May—"

Marjory stood motionless, as with a harsh little laugh he strode away from her. She could not have borne any more; but when Uncle Charles came suddenly round the corner of the old house, blown so suddenly round by the wind, which seemed to sway his long legs and slight, stooping figure, there burst from her, too, a little hysterical laugh,

which somehow seemed to relieve her as tears might have done.

"What a wind!" said Mr. Charles. "You may laugh, but a slim person has hard ado to stand before it; and rising every moment, May. I should not like to be on the Firth to-night."

"I hope we shall get across," said May, eagerly, "before it is quite dark."

"Get across?" said Uncle Charles, in consternation. "Who is going to Edinburgh to-night?"

"Oh! Uncle Charles, my heart is breaking! Tom has had a terrible accident. Perhaps he is dying. We must go to him at once. And papa will not believe me; he will not understand how serious it is."

"God bless me!" said Mr. Charles. He made a few sudden steps towards the house, and then he came back. "My dear May, there's you to think of. What is it? I'll go myself."

"No, no, no," she said. "It was me he sent for. Oh, uncle, quick! bid them make haste with the carriage; we shall lose the train."

When the carriage came round to the door ten minutes after, Mr. Charles put aside the two travelling bags which had been placed inside, and took his place opposite the father and daughter on the front seat.

"I'm coming too," he said.

Mr. Heriot gave vent to another strange little laugh.

"We had better have Milly in, and Mrs. Simpson, and all the rest," he cried; but he made no further

remark or objection. His ruddy, rural countenance had paled somehow. It looked as Marjory had seen it after a period of confinement in town (town meant Edinburgh more than London to the Hay-Heriots, though sometimes they went to London too), when the sun-burnt brownness had worn off. He leant back in his corner and did not speak; he had not even asked where they were going. He seemed eager to keep up his appearance of indifference; but his heart had failed him. Mr. Charles, however, on the contrary, seemed to feel that all the amusement of the party depended upon him. He kept up a perpetual stream of talk, till the very sound of his voice made Marjory sick.

"We'll find him drinking beer, like the man in Thackeray's book," said Mr. Charles; "a ruffianly sort of hero in my way of thinking; but that's what you like, you young folk. We'll find him drinking beer, I'm saying, May, as well as ever he was. I think I can hear the great laugh he will give when he sees the whole procession of us coming in."

Mr. Heriot was nettled by his brother's interference, yet not disposed to depart from his own *rôle* of indifference.

"It's a fool's errand," he said; "but you may diminish the procession, Charles, if you like. It will be no procession, if there is only May and me."

Mr. Charles made no reply to this; he continued his cheerful talk.

"It's the penalty of all violent sports," he said; "even your cricket that such a fuss is made about. There's no risks of that kind with golf, now, for

instance; and in my way of thinking, a far nobler game; but as for horses and hounds, they're simple destruction—in the first place to a man's living, and in the second to his bones."

"You never were great across country," said Mr. Heriot, satirically. "It was never one of the sins you were inclined to commit. That must be taken into account."

"And the consequence is I never had a broken limb," said Mr. Charles; "no surgeon has ever been needed for me; whereas the rest of you have spent, let us say three weeks in the year on an average, in your beds—"

With intervals, this kind of talk went on until the travellers had reached the edge of the stormy Firth, which spread like some huge boiling cauldron in black and white between them and the misty heights of Edinburgh. It was late twilight failing into night; but as there was a moon somewhere, the stormy landscape was held between light and dark in a pale visibleness which had something unearthly in it. Arthur's Seat appeared through the mist like a giant, with huge sullen shoulders turned upon them, and head averted. The boiling Firth was black and covered with foam.

While Marjory sat wrapping her cloak close round her in the most sheltered corner, her uncle, with the fierce wind catching at his slim legs, came and leaned over her, and tried what he could, in gasps between the gusts of the storm, to keep up his consolatory remarks.

"This is nothing, Marjory, my dear; nothing to

what it used to be," he said in snatches, blown about, now by the wind, now by the lurches of the steamer, "when we used to have to go, in a sailing-boat, from Kinghorn to Leith. This is nothing, nothing; I have seen the day—"

But here being driven first into her lap, and then forced to retreat violently backwards, in obedience to the next wave, Mr. Charles for the moment succumbed.

What a strange tragi-comedy it was! The boats from Comlie shore were out in that merciless storm, and the poor fisher-wives at their windows, or marching with bare feet on the sharp rocks, were looking out upon the struggles of their "men" to reach the harbour, which that wild suppressed light permitted them the additional misery of seeing. On the other hand, far away in the peaceful inland depths of England, Tom Heriot was lying tragically gay with fever; sometimes delirious, shouting out all kinds of strange follies in the ear of his friend, who was no better than himself. While yet between the two the wind made a jest and plaything of Mr. Charles Heriot, seizing him by his legs and tossing him about as in a rough game of ball, taking the words out of his mouth, though they were words of wisdom, and dispersing his axioms to the merciless waves. Even Marjory could not but laugh as she wrapped herself closer in her cloak. She laughed, and then felt the sobs struggle upward choking into her throat.

Then came the long night journey, silent, yet loud, with the perpetual plunging and jarring of the

railway, that strange, harsh, prosaic jar—which yet, to those who listen to it all through an anxious night as May did—is an awful sound. Ordinary wheels and hoofs make a very different impression on the mind; but there is something in the monotonous clang of a railway which sounds unearthly to an excited mind, thus whirled through the darkness. How fast the colourless hedgerows, the dark spectres of trees, the black stretches of country fly past, with now and then a flitting phantasmagoria of lights from some town or village; and yet how slow, how lingering, how dreary are the minutes which tick themselves out one by one with a desperate persistence and steadiness! In the faint and uncertain lamplight the face of her father dozing uneasily in the corner opposite to her, seemed to Marjory so blanched and worn, that she could scarcely keep herself from watching him in alarm, to make sure that he was living and well. Uncle Charles was at the other end of the carriage, shifting his long legs uneasily, sometimes uttering a dismal groan as he awoke, with a twinge of cramp, to which he was subject. He had filled the carriage with newspapers and railway books, by way of amusing Marjory.

"I don't pretend that I can read myself by this unsteady light," he said; "but you're young, May, and they'll keep you from thinking."

Poor Marjory! it was her youth (she thought) which made her so capable of thinking, and kept from her eyes the broken sleep which brought momentary rest to her companions. Thus passed the lingering weary night.

CHAPTER V.

After this long journey, to step out into the bright daylight of a March morning — cold, but sunshiny; and into the unfamiliar clean little streets of an English country-town, gave the most curious sensation to the travellers. Marjory stepped out of the carriage like one in a dream. The long sleepless night, the fatigue of the journey, the ache of anxiety in her mind, seemed to wrap a kind of painful mist about her, through which she saw vaguely the circumstances of the arrival, the unknown figures moving about, the strange houses — some still shuttered and closed up as for the night, while the cheerful stir of early morning had begun with others. Was it possible that all these unknown people had slept softly and soundly all that long night through; and knew of nothing to pluck away their rest from them, or pull their life asunder? The simplest things startled this little weary group as they hurried along the quiet sunshiny street. A cheerful red and white maid-of-all-work opening the windows, looking out with fresh vacant face upon them as they passed, looked as if she must have something to tell them. And so did the milkman clashing with his pails; and the early errand-boy stopping in the midst of his whistle to contemplate the two tall old men—Mr. Heriot, with

that strangely blanched hue struggling through his brownness—Mr. Charles long and thin, and shaky with fatigue.

"A clean little place; a clean little place!" the latter was saying encouragingly to Marjory, as if there was some faint consolation to be drawn from that fact. It was very unlike Comlie. Some of the houses were old, with peaked gables and lattice windows, but the line of flat brick buildings, such as the Scottish mind regards with disdain, with the cleanest of curtains and shutters, and tidy ugly orderliness, filled up the greater part of the street. The inn to which they were bound had a projecting sign, upon which the sun shone—a white horse, which swung, and pranced, and creaked in the morning air, over the low deep gateway by which the house was approached. The travellers were met by a little blear-eyed ostler, who peered at them anxiously from under the shelter of his hand.

"For Mr. 'Eriot?" he said, putting up his disengaged hand to his forehead, by way of salutation.

"How is he?" cried Marjory, a sudden sickness coming over her; the sickness of suspense which is never so tremendous as when it is about to be satisfied.

The little ostler shrugged his shoulders, and shook his ragged, shaggy head.

"I don't know as he's worse nor better," he said. "Much the same, they tell me. He's in the hands o' them doctors, as is enough to kill twenty men. That's why I've come to meet ye, my lady

and gentlemen. There's a bone-setter in this place as 'ud set him right in a jiffy; you take my word. He's a nice gentleman; he gave me ten bob jist for nothing at all. You make 'em send for Job Turner, my lady. I know him. That's your sort for brokuə bones. What am I doing, master? Party for Mr. 'Eriot! nothin' in the world but showing the lady the way."

The ostler's speech had been interrupted by the master of the hotel, who came to the door bowing solemnly, endeavouring to combine the usual smiling benignity with which he received new guests with the gravity befitting the occasion.

"Walk in, gentlemen," he said. "I think I may make bold to say that the news is good, so far as it goes. We've spent a pretty comfortable night, sir, on the whole—a pretty comfortable night. Perhaps the lady would like to rest a bit afore breakfast. Mr. Fanshawe, Sir, as is with Mr. 'Eriot, made sure as you'd come. Your rooms are all ready, and I hope as I'll be able to make you and the lady as comfortable—as comfortable as is to be expected under the circumstances."

"Cheer up, May," said Mr. Heriot. It was the first time he had spoken since their arrival. "I told you it would turn out a trifle. You see the boy's better already. Cheer up," said the old man, faltering, and looking at her with glassy eyes. "We've had a fright, but, thank God, it's over. Cheer up, my bonny May!"

For Marjory, so far from cheering up, had sunk down on the first chair, altogether overcome by the

suspense and the information, and the sense of still more sickening suspense until she should see with her own eyes and judge how it was.

Tom Heriot had been far from passing, as the landlord said, a comfortable night; but he had slept for some hours towards the morning, and had awoke feeling, as he said, better, and in high spirits.

"After all I'll cheat the doctors yet," he had said to his friend. "I am half sorry now you sent for May. It will frighten them all to death at home. Odd as it may seem to you, the old boy's fond of me in his way. And, by Jove, Fanshawe, I'll try if I can't make a change somehow, and be a comfort to him, and all that. Life's a queer sort of business after all," said the prodigal, raising his shoulders from the pillows, and supporting himself on his hands. "It isn't the straightforward thing a fellow thinks when he's beginning. Have your swing, that's all very well—and God knows I've had mine, and done some things I can't undo; but when one goes in for having one's swing, one expects to have a steady time after, and settle to work and put all straight. Look here, Fanshawe—if I had died, as I thought I should last night! By Jove, to have nothing but your swing and end there, it isn't much, is it, for a man's life?"

"No, it isn't much," said his friend; "but don't get on thinking, Tom, it's bad for your back."

"I don't believe it's my back," said Tom; "it's my legs or something. I'm as light as a bird, all here." And he struck himself some playful blows

across the chest. "When the doctor comes, you'll see he'll say there's a difference. Get me some breakfast, there's a good fellow. I wonder if they've come. You've heard me talk of May, Fanshawe? She's not the sort of girl every fellow likes, and I've thought she was hard on me sometimes. Superior, you know—that sort of thing. Looking down, by Jove, upon her brother." And here Tom laughed loudly, with an exquisite enjoyment of the joke. "But it would be pleasant to see her all the same. Who is that at the door? What! My sister! By George, May, this is being a thorough brick, and no mistake."

"Oh, Tom, you are better!" cried Marjory, struck with a sudden weakness of delight as she saw the colour in his face and his sparkling eyes.

"Almost well," he said, cheerfully, while she stooped over him; "well enough to be sorry I sent for you, and glad you've come. So you thought your poor wicked old brother worth looking after? You're a good girl, May; you're a dear girl. It's a pleasure to see you. And you're a beauty, too, by Jove, that can stand the morning light."

"Tom!" said Marjory, gently.

She was struck to the heart by the sight she saw. His countenance had melted into soft lines like a child's; the tears were standing in his over-bright eyes. Who does not know that human sentiment which trembles to see a sick man look too amiable, too angelical, too *good?* This sudden dread came over Marjory. She stood gazing at him and at the

moisture in his eyes with a feeling that blanched all the morning freshness out of her face.

"All right," said Tom. "I won't praise you to your face, especially as Fanshawe's there; though he's as good a fellow as ever was. I'll tell you after, all I owe to him. But who came with you, May? and how did you persuade the two old boys to let you go? and how's my father and little Milly, and all the rest of them? Sit down here, where I can reach you. Fanshawe, she wants a cup of tea or something."

"I want to hear about you, Tom," said Marjory, mastering, as well as she could, the impression made upon her by her brother's emotion, and by the dark uncheering looks of Fanshawe, his previous nurse, who had shaken hands with her, but who avoided her eye. "But first I must tell you, the two old boys, as you call them, came with me. My father is here."

"My father—here!" said the prodigal, once more raising his head from the pillow. A crimson flush came over his face, and his eyes filled with tears. "I told you they were fond of me at home," he said, turning faltering to his friend, "and by Jove, May—no, I won't say that—By God, as you're both witnesses, I'll turn over a new leaf, and be a comfort to him from this day!"

By an impulse which she could scarcely define, Marjory turned from her brother's flushed and excited face to Fanshawe, who had retired to the other side of the room, and whom she had seen joining his hands together with a sudden movement of pain.

When he caught her eye he shook his head gently. Then she knew what was before them.

Mr. Heriot, however, suspected nothing; he came in, still with something of the paleness which had come upon him when he first realized the news; but in five minutes had recovered his colour, and composure, and was himself.

"Your sister was anxious, my boy!" he said. "It is a woman's fault; and, for my part, I don't blame them. Rather that than man's indifference, Tom. May would go through fire and water for anybody belonging to her. It makes them troublesome to steady-going folks, now and then; but it's a good fault—a good fault."

And Mr. Heriot, after a few minutes, cheerfully invited Mr. Fanshawe—to whom he made many old-fashioned acknowledgments—to go downstairs with him to breakfast, leaving Marjory with her brother.

"We'll send her something upstairs," he said; "I know she'll like best to be with Tom."

"She should get a rest first," said Mr. Charles, grumbling momentarily in behalf of his favourite; but finally they all left the sick-room, going down to breakfast in high spirits. Tom, by this time, somewhat pale, lay back on his pillows, and looked admiringly and gratefully at his sister. A certain calm of well-being seemed to have fallen over him, which, in spite of herself, gave Marjory hope.

"And to think," he said softly, "that last night—only last night, I had given everything up, and never hoped to see one of you again. May, give me your hand; you're a good girl. It's true what

my father said: you would go through fire and water. That's the old Scotch way; not so much for other people as women are now-a-days; but through fire and water—through fire and water, for your own! If you had been here last night I might have told you something—"

"Tell it to me now, Tom."

"No; I don't want you to think worse of me than you do. Please God, I will live and mend, and take up all my tangled threads, as Aunt Jean says. How is old Aunt Jean? Cankered body! but I suppose she would have done it too—through fire and water. Do you know, May, there's a great deal of meaning, sometimes, in what these old boys say."

"I wish you would not call them old boys, Tom."

"Well, well—they are not young boys, are they? There is one thing tho' about women—or, so I've always heard, at least. They say you're hard on other women. If you were called on now to help a woman that was not your flesh and blood?—for the sake of those who were your flesh and blood—"

Marjory's face was covered with a deep blush; there was but one idea that could be connected with such a speech; she had to conquer a momentary repugnance, an impulse of indignation and shame. But she did conquer it.

"Tom!" she said anxiously; "I hope I could be faithful to my trust. Tell me what it is?"

"Not I!" said Tom, laughing. "No, no, Miss May; I am not going to give you the whiphand over me. I can trust myself best. I am getting well, thank Heaven; and I'll pick up my tangled threads.

It is not a bad phrase that, either. Lord, what a lot of tangled threads I seemed to be leaving last night!"

What could Marjory say? She held his hand between hers and patted it softly, and kissed it with her heart full. It was not like a sick man's hand, white and wasted. It was brown and muscular, and strong, capable of crushing hers, had he wished; and yet lay somewhat passively embraced by her slender fingers, as if—like the tide ebbing slowly from the shore, the strength had begun to ebb away.

"However, it's well to be warned," said Tom. "And, after all, I have done less harm than you would think; nobody's enemy but my own—as people say. There's no sensation I ever felt so curious as that one—of thinking you're dying. What an awful fool you've been, you say to yourself; and now it's no good. Struggle as you like, you can't mend it; you must just lie still and take what's coming. I say, May," he added, with a sudden start. "Say something and be cheery, or I'll get into the dumps again."

"Here's the doctor, Tom," said Fanshawe at the door.

Marjory rose and left the room quickly; she could not bear to meet the eye of that final authority, whose glance seems to convey life or death. She went and stood by her brother's friend outside on the landing. It was an old-fashioned winding oak staircase; and looking down they could see the movements of the house; the waiters carrying in dishes to the room where the father and uncle were breakfasting; and sometimes, when the door opened, could

hear the roll of their vigorous Northern voices. Marjory stood with her hand on the oak balustrade, and looked wistfully into Fanshawe's face.

"Do you mean," she said, "that there is no hope?"

He made a little gesture of pain and shook his head; his eyes looked hollow, as if with tears. It was watching that had done it, but the effect was the same.

"Then he ought to know; he must know!" said Marjory.

"To what good, Miss Heriot? Do you think God takes a man unawares like that, to exact everything from him the same as if he had had long warning? I am not so good as you; but I think better of my Maker than that."

"Mr. Fanshawe, this is no time to argue," said Marjory, shivering; "but my poor Tom ought to know."

"It would kill him in a moment," said Fanshawe, "the shock would be too great; he has few enough moments to live. Go and pray for him, Miss Heriot; that's better than telling him. You are far more likely to be paid attention to up yonder than fellows like poor Tom or me."

And all the while fresh dishes were being carried in from the kitchen, and Mr. Heriot's laugh, a large sound of ease and relief—the gaiety of a man just delivered from deadly anxiety—rang like a certainty of well-being all through the house. The breakfast was still going on when the doctor went downstairs; his grave face startled Tom's father.

"You find your patient better, doctor?" he said.

"I cannot say I do," the doctor answered, somewhat solemnly. "Though his strength has held out better than I thought."

"But I assure you—the boy is looking as well as I ever saw him. His colour is good, and his eyes bright; and no suffering to speak of."

"The explanation of that is but too easy," said the doctor. "I suppose no one has told you the particulars. So long as there was pain there was a little hope. It is a hard thing to say to a father, but I must say it. Your son's injury, Sir, is in the spine."

"My God!"

Mr. Heriot stumbled up blindly from his chair; he put his hand out to grope his way to the door, and with the other thrust away from him the table at which he had been seated. The doctor rushed after and seized him by the arm.

"If you go into his room with that face, you will kill him on the spot!" he cried.

"And when will you—or nature, as you call it—kill him?" cried Mr. Charles, coming forward in his turn. "Thomas, my man, Thomas! you've still the others left."

"He may last a few hours longer—not more," said the doctor. "I shall come back presently;" and he rushed away, glad to escape from such a scene, and left those whom it most concerned to bear it as they could.

The two old brothers had taken each other by the hand. They stood together as they had done when they were boys; but one had his face hidden

on the wall, against which he leant and heard the words of the other vaguely through his anguish, as if they were uttered miles away.

"Thomas! think. He is not your only child! there are others well worthy of your love. We must grieve—it's God's will; but for God's sake dinna despair!"

What mockery the words seemed; merest commonplaces, easy to say, but hard, impossible to give an ear to. Despair? what else was there left for the man who was about to see his son die?

CHAPTER VI.

He lingered the greater part of the day. Marjory took her place permanently by his bedside, where Fanshawe had been seated when she first appeared. She had allowed herself to be entreated to say nothing to him; but a certain fixed awe and pain in her look communicated themselves to Tom's mind without a word said. He noticed this at first with an uneasy laugh.

"Ah, I see you think badly of me, May. You think I am going, though I deceive myself. Don't deny it. If I was not so sure by my feelings that you are wrong, you would make me think so too."

"I am anxious," she said. "You know what papa says, Tom, it is a woman's fault."

"Ay, so he did," said her brother; "he has sense enough for half-a-dozen. I wish I had minded him more. May, you needn't be so frightened. If I am going, as you think—well, well! there would be nothing to be so dismal about. It has to be one time or another. If it were not for all those tangled threads, and things done that shouldn't have been done, and left undone that should have been done, like the Prayer-book. I suppose it's the common way. Good and bad would not say it every Sunday, if it were not the common way."

"It is the very commonest way of all, Tom."

"I thought so. Then I'll be forgiven, too, like the rest, if that's all. The old doctor at Comlie would be harder on a fellow than the Prayer-book is. You're great for the Kirk, May, and I suppose, as we're Scotch, you're right; but if I were a religious fellow, which I'm not, I would go in for the Prayer-book, mind you; it's kinder; it asks fewer questions. We have done what we ought not to have done; we have left undone—If I had time just now, and felt up to it, I would like to tell you something, May."

"Tell me, Tom," she said, eagerly. "We are quiet now; there's nobody here."

"Presently," he said; and then fell into a musing state, from which she could not rouse him. Now and then he would brighten up, and call her attention to a fly on the ceiling; to the pattern of the paper on the walls; to an old picture over the mantel-piece; smiling and commenting upon them.

"The walls should not be papered in a room where a man is to lie ill," he said. "If you knew what strange figures they turn into. There's an old witch in that corner with a red nose and a red cap; don't you see her? Last night she kept sailing about the room on a broomstick, or something; and, by Jove! there is that unhappy fly astride on her red nose!"

At this idea he laughed feebly, yet loudly. How that laugh echoed down into May's heart! He would not allow anything more serious to be spoken of.

"I am too tired to be sensible," he said. "Don't

disturb my fly, May. He's numb, poor fellow, after the Winter. I only hope if the witch takes to riding about again, to-night, she won't disturb him. I don't see her broomstick to-day. Trifling talk, eh? To be sure, it's nonsense; but if a man may not indulge in a little nonsense when he's laid by the heels like this, and has a nice sister smiling at him—"

Here the poor fellow put out his hand to her, which Marjory took within her own, doing her best to keep up the smile which pleased him, though there were few exertions of strength which would not have been easier to her at the moment.

"I like nonsense," she said, softly. "But, Tom, somebody will come in presently and disturb us. Tell me, dear, first what you wanted to say."

"Presently," said Tom. "I have not quite made up my mind about it. There's time enough—time enough. Show Uncle Charles that print when he comes up. I think it's a good one. I thought of him as soon as I saw it. What quiet steady-going lives now, these old fellows live! It's strange for a man to think of settling down into that sort of thing, you know, but I suppose I shall come to it in time like the rest. Farming, like my father, or prints, and books, and coins, and so forth. May, you women have other kind of ideas; but fancy giving up youth, and stir, and movement, and all that makes life pleasant—for that."

"I suppose when one is old it is the quietness that makes life pleasant," said poor Marjory, aching

to her very finger-points with a sense that this life was ebbing away while they thus talked.

"By Jove, I don't think it would ever make life pleasant to me," said Tom. And then with a curious consciousness, he looked up at her, half defiant, half inquiring. "You think, I suppose," he said, "that I will never give myself the chance to try if I go on in this way. Never you fear, May; I know when to pull up as well as you do. Fun first, sobriety afterwards—never you fear. I may have had about my swing by this time. Mind, I make no rash promises, but if I keep in the same mind when I get better— I suppose the old boy would give me a house somewhere, when I'm married and settled. Married and settled!" he repeated, with a somewhat wild laugh; and then stopped abruptly, and added, "that's the worst of it—there's the rub."

Marjory did not follow this lead; she had grown confused with misery, feeling that she sinned against him, trying to think of something she could say to him which should lead his mind to other thoughts. She saw nothing but levity in what he said, and her own mind seemed paralysed. She could have thrown herself upon him and begged him in so many words to think that he was dying; but nothing less direct than this seemed possible. She sat by him, holding his hand between hers, gazing wistfully at him, but with her mind far from what he was saying, labouring and struggling to think of something that would warn without alarming him. He, for his part, looked at her somewhat wistfully too. Certain words seemed on his very lips, which one syllable from her, had

she but comprehended, would have drawn forth; but, in the inscrutable isolation of humanity, the two pair of eyes met, both overbrimming with meaning, but with a meaning incommunicable. What a pitiful gaze it was on both sides!

At last Marjory, feeling the silence insupportable, burst forth into a few faltering words, from which she tried hard to keep all appearance of strong emotion.

"Tom, we used to say our prayers in the nursery together when you were ill, don't you remember? 'Pray God take away Tom's fever,' I used to say. And this is so like old times. Tom—I don't think I said my prayers this morning—"

He put up his hand to stop her, and then his countenance changed and melted, and some moisture came into his bright eyes. He gave a strange little laugh.

"I was a better boy in those days than I am now."

"You never made yourself out to be good," said Marjory, with tears; "but you were always good to me. Oh, God bless you, dear Tom! if we were only to say, 'Our Father'—after being up all night—don't you think it would do us good?"

"Say what you like, May."

The words were common-place, but not the tone; and Marjory, with his hand clasped tighter within hers, was kneeling down by the bed, when the door opened, and their father came in. Mr. Heriot had grown ten years older in that half

hour. He came in with a miserable smile, put on at the door as a woman might have put on a veil.

"Well, Tom, my man, and how are we getting on now?" he said, with an attempt at hearty jocularity, most pitifully unlike his natural tone.

Tom looked from his father's ghostly pretence at ease to his sister's face, as she knelt by the bed, with his hand pressed between hers, now and then softly kissing it, and smiling at him with an effort which became more and more painful. A change came over his own countenance. With a sudden scared look, he thrust his other hand into his father's, and grasped him tight, like a frightened child.

"Don't let me go!" he cried, with one momentary unspeakable pang.

Then swiftly as the mind moves at moments in which a whole life-time seems concentrated, he recovered his mental balance. How few fail at that grand crisis! He recovered himself with one of those strange rallyings of mental courage which make all sorts of men die bravely with fortitude and calm. The whole revolution of feeling—enlightenment, despair, self-command—passed so quickly that only spectators equally absorbed and concentrated could have followed them.

"Well!" he said, finally, "if it is to be so, we must bear it, father. We must bear it as well as we can."

Meanwhile Mr. Charles, not knowing what to do with himself, had examined everything in the

sitting-room downstairs, not because there was anything to interest him, but because, while he suffered as much as the others, he had not, like the others, a primary claim to be with the chief sufferer of all.

"Best leave them alone, best leave them alone," he had said to himself a dozen times over. "They're better alone with him—better alone."

But his mind was full of *malaise*, anxiety, and pain. And after a while he wandered out into the yard of the inn, where still there was a great commotion, horses and dogs about, and a floating population of grooms. Mr. Charles went and looked at one or two of the slim glossy hunters which were being taken out for exercise, or which were being prepared to depart, as the hunting season approached its end. He was a man of very different tastes; yet he was country-born and country-bred, and knew the points of a horse. Poor man, this new investigation chimed in strangely with the very different thoughts in his mind. He looked at the animals with an eye that could not help seeing, but an aching heart whose attention was directed elsewhere. While he was thus standing in the middle of the yard, vaguely examining everything around him, the deformed old ostler came up to him once more.

"Beg your pardon, Sir, but do you know if they've sent for the bone-setter, Sir, as I spoke to you and the lady about? T'other old gentleman won't listen to me, not on no consideration. He's awful cut up, he is; and I ask you, Sir, as a gen-

tleman and a scholar, is this a time to be standing on p's and q's, and thinking what's most genteel and that? Job Turner ain't genteel, but he'll save Mr. 'Eriot's life, soon as look at 'im. Do'ee have him, now; do'ee have 'im;" cried the old man, with tears in the strange little blear eyes which shone out of his face from among the dark puckers of his cheeks and brow like diamonds. "Them brutes would have had the breath out o' me years and years since, if it hadn't a-been for Job. Every bone in my body, Sir, he's put to rights, and joined together sometime. Now, do'ee have him; do'ee now, my gentleman! he'll mend Mr. 'Eriot like he mended me. Men is alike, just as 'osses is alike; they've the same bones, and flesh and blood. Nature makes no account o' one being a gentleman and one in the stables. Oh, Lord bless you, Sir, do'ee have him, or you'll never forgive yourself. You all know Job Turner, mates; speak up for him, for God's sake, and let the gentleman hear what he is."

"He's a rare 'un for bones!" cried one of the grooms.

"He'll work your joint back into its socket, like as it was a strayed babby!" cried another.

"Ain't he now; don't he now, boys!" cried the old ostler; "speak up for him, for God's sake; it's for young Mr. 'Eriot, as always was the pleasantest gentleman I ever see in a 'unting field, or out on't; he gave me ten bob just for nothing at all, the last blessed morning as ever he rode out o' this yere yard. Lord bless you, Sir, we'll have him up and

well in a week if you won't mind his not being genteel, and send for Job."

"Hold your nonsense!" said another man, interfering. "Job ain't the Lord to kill and make alive. The young gentleman's broken his back; send you for the clergyman, or some one as 'll give him good advice, Sir. They ain't fit to die at a moment's notice, no more nor the likes of us. Send for the clergyman, Sir, if you'll take my advice."

Mr. Charles stood and looked from one to the other with a certain weary bewilderment; he felt as if the family misfortune, which had thus fallen upon the Hay-Heriots, out of all precedent, a thing that never had happened before, had made him a mark at which every kind of arrow might be shot. He shook his head as he went away, pursued by the old ostler's entreaties.

"One thing is certain, that these bone-setting bodies learn a great deal about the human frame," he said to himself; "not scientific information, but something that's like inspiration sometimes. It might be too late; or it might be nonsense altogether. Perhaps he could do nothing for poor Tom, perhaps—should I go back and speak to Thomas, and try? But what's the good of disturbing the poor fellow for nothing? It could not come to anything; you may mend legs and arms, but you cannot mend the spine. God bless us all; this is what it comes to, to give a lad his own way, and let him take his swing! And it will kill his father. Never was it known yet, in all the records, that a Hay-Heriot died like this—the heir without an heir; leaving it

all to go in the second line. If I could but know whether this Job what-do-you-call-him would be of any use! It would worry Thomas to ask him; but what of that if it saved the lad? My mind's in a terrible swither, whether to try or not. Job! Job! It's an uncanny kind of name. Oh, my bonnie May, if I could but have five minutes speech of you to say ay or no! And there's no time, if anything can be done. I think I'll risk it. God help us! He knows; but we do not; it can do no harm. Hey! hi! hem! you crooked old body! That's uncivil; he'll pay no attention. I want the other man, a bit little withered up, crooked—Hi! my good man; come here and tell me where your Job—what do you call him—is to be found. I don't know if he can do anything; but if you'll show me where he lives, I'll try."

"Lord bless you, Sir, I knew as you were a reasonable gentleman," said the ostler, limping up. "It's but a poor place, but what o' that? and master and groom we're all much the same. Leastways, so far as bones go, as is the foundation like. This way, Sir; it ain't above ten minutes from here—if Job's in; which he ain't always, at this time of the day. Gentlefolks thinks little of him; but poor folks think much; and he's out and about over all the country, wherever there is a leg out, or a bone broken. It is a chance if we find 'im; but a man can but do his best, when all's said; and it ain't not more than ten, or say fifteen minutes walk."

"Quick, man, quick!" said Mr. Charles; but the

road to Job's house was through the back streets of the little town, which were swarming with children, and full of wandering provision merchants selling vegetables and earthenware, and a great many other descriptions of merchandize; for it was Saturday, and market-day. To the stranger, with his sick heart and his brain buzzing with pain and suspense, the twistings and turnings of the narrow lanes, the streets they had to cross, the passages they threaded through, the corners they turned seemed endless. What a fool's errand it was, after all, he thought! and then something seemed to call him, which sounded now like Marjory's appealing voice—now like poor Tom's cry of pain. What was he doing here, astray, in a strange place? seeking out some unknown quack; leaving his own people perhaps to bear "the worst that could happen," without such support as he could give? He suddenly turned round, while his guide was enlarging upon Job's gifts, and upon the unlikelihood of finding him—an argument which was not intended to discourage Mr. Charles, but only to enhance Job's importance—

"Go yourself and find him!" he said; "I'm going back! I'm going back! I may be wanted. Bring the man, and I'll pay him—and you too." And with these words Mr. Charles darted across the street, with a vain but confident endeavour to retraverse the way he had come. He fell over the children; he was all but run down by the wheelbarrows; and as was natural, he lost his way. And words could not tell the painful confusion of his

mind as he wound in and out, round and round in a circle, never seeming to approach a step nearer; growing every moment more wretched, more anxious, more confused; figuring to himself what might be passing in the sick-room; how he might be wanted; and how "the worst" might have happened, while he was about this wild goose chase. When he got back at last to the door of the hotel, the old ostler had reached it before him, and stood waiting in the yard with a villainous companion, who pulled his forelock to the confused and tremulous gentleman, and announced himself as Job Turner.

"You mayn't think he's much to look at, Sir," whispered the ostler, under shelter of his hand; "but if you knowed all, as I know—the cures he's done; the bones he's set; the folk as he's brought up from the grave—"

Mr. Charles waved his hand—he was too breathless to speak—and hurried upstairs. A dead calm seemed to have fallen on the house. A frightened woman-servant met him on the stairs, creeping down on tiptoe. It seemed to be years that he had been wandering about the streets, absent from his post. Then the doctor met him, and pointed silently to the closed door, shaking his head. Trembling, conscience-stricken, weary and sick with his suspense, Mr. Charles crept into the sick-room. All was quiet and silent there, except some gasps for breath. Mr. Heriot stood at one side of the bed, Marjory at the other. Fanshawe, Tom's friend, was at the foot, leaning against the bed, and hiding his face with his hand. Mr. Charles trembled too much to be of

use to any one; he stood behind them all, wiping his forehead, trying to see with his hot and dazzled eyes.

Nothing to be done, and nothing to be said! It had come to that. Tom was out of hearing, though they had so much to say to him. And he, too, had much to say, but had left it all unsaid. Who can tell the anguish of such a moment for those who are called upon to survive? To stand by helpless, impotent; willing to do everything, capable of nothing—nothing but to look on. Humanity has no agony so great.

At the very last, poor Tom came out of his death-struggle, as by a miracle, and looked at his watchers.

"I told you, May," he said, faintly. "I told you!" These were his last words. He seemed to die repeating them in a whisper, which grew fainter and fainter: "I told her—told her; I told—thank God!"

Oh! for what, poor deceived soul? They looked at each other with a thrill of terror which overcame even their grief. What did he thank God for as he crossed the threshold of the other life?

CHAPTER VII.

THE Manse of Comlie had one window, which looked upon the churchyard—only one, as Mrs. Murray congratulated herself—and that in a room which was never used but where on occasional moments now and then the old lady would go and sit by herself, not rejecting for her own part the pensive associations which she deprecated for others. On the day of poor Tom Heriot's funeral, there were two old faces at this window. One was that of Miss Jean Heriot, in new "blacks," as she called her mourning; whose interest in the melancholy ceremony had overcome even that strong sense of decorum with which a Scottish woman of her age would, under other circumstances, have shut herself up on the day of a funeral "in the family."

In Scotland, in former days, the attendance of a woman at a funeral was unknown; and it was partly because it was understood that Marjory was to be present, that her old grand-aunt stole across in the early morning, before any one was about, in order to witness, with a mixture of grief, interest, and disapproval, the innovations in the simple ceremonial with which the heir of Pitcomlie was conducted to his last resting-place.

"I don't know what we are coming to," said Miss Jean. "You may like these new-fangled ways,

Mrs. Murray; but for my part, I would just as soon take to the Prayer-book for good and a', and be done with compromises; or even the mass-book, for that matter. When you once begin to pray over a grave, how long do you think it'll be before you pray for the dead?"

"It will never be in the doctor's time, that I can answer for," said the Minister's wife, with firmness. "For my part, if it's an innovation, it pleases me. Oh! to hear the thud of the earth, and no' a word said! It is bad enough—bad enough, even when it's done like baptism, in the name of the Father and the Son."

"If you had not been there, you would not have heard," interrupted Miss Jean. "I hate to see women trailing after a funeral; it's no their place."

"I was not there, and yet I heard," said Mrs. Murray; "there are things you hear with your heart, though you're far away. And why should not women go to the grave with those that belong to them? It is us that takes care of them to their last breath. Why should not May come with the rest to lay her brother in his grave? after standing by him, poor lad, till his end."

"It would fit her best to stay at home," said Aunt Jean; "women are always best at home, especially when they're young. Thomas has brought up that girl his own way, not my way. I would have trained her very different. When I was Marjory's age I never dared lift up my face to my mother. What she said should be, it was—no contradiction; no setting up to know better than your elders;

whereas it's my devout opinion that girl thinks herself wiser than the likes of you or me."

"And so she is in some things," said Mrs. Murray; "far wiser than me, at least, Miss Jean. I've seen her pose the doctor himself, which is not saying little. And here they are, coming down by the east knoll. Oh! what a black, black procession! And to think it's Tom Heriot! waes me! waes me! —him that should have been bidding us all to his bridal instead of this cruel grave-side!"

Miss Jean said nothing for the moment. She put her aged head close to the window, and followed with an intent gaze of her bright old eyes the dark line that wound down into the churchyard from the higher ground above. What strange sense of the wonder of it may have passed through her mind, who can tell? She was old; her generation was over; not one of those who had been with her in her youth was with her now. Alone, a spectator of the works and ways that were not as her ways and works, she had been keenly looking on and criticising the younger world around for many a day. She had seen the boy born whose remains were now carried before her; she had almost seen his father born. Yet she was here, still a keen spectator, looking on while that young representative of the race was laid among their ancestors.

She said nothing; her sharp eyes glittered as she gazed; she folded her thin hands, all wrinkled and yellow, like old ivory, on the top of her cane, and nothing escaped her keen observation. She took in the new—or what she fancied new—fashion of

Marjory's dress, as well as the enormous train of county friends, old family connections, tenants, and neighbours, who had come to do honour to the Heriots. This gave her a thrill of pleasure in the chillness of her old age, which felt no very strenuous emotion. She counted them upon her withered fingers as they passed down into the grassy churchyard, and ranged themselves against the grey old lichened wall which surrounded it on that side, set close with the grotesque monuments of the last two centuries.

"I see scarce anybody wanting," she said, with a certain subdued exultation; "scarce anybody on this side of Fife but the Sinclairs, and they're away. Thomas does not please me in many of his ways, but I'll say this for him, that he has kept up the credit of the house, and all the old family friends."

Mrs. Murray was crying quietly, with her eyes fixed upon the central group, where stood Mr. Heriot himself, with drooping head, his tall figure showing among all the other tall men who surrounded him with a certain majesty of weakness which went to the heart of this looker-on. His daughter seemed to be leaning on his arm, but by the way in which she clung to him, moving as he moved, Mrs. Murray divined that in reality it was Marjory who supported her father.

It was a bright day, perfectly serene and calm; the sun shining, a gentle little breeze caressing the waving grass, and breathing softly over the mourners. There had been rain in the morning, so that everything was dewy and moist. It was what country

people call "a growing day;" a day on which you could almost see the new buds opening out, and hear the new blades of the grass escape out of their sheaths; a day of life and overbrimming vitality; the kind of day in which it is hardest to think of dying or of death.

"Eh, waes me, waes me!" said the old lady, who knew what loss was, with the tears running down her soft old cheeks, as the coffin was lowered into the grave.

Then rose that strangely solemn sound—one voice rising in the open air in the daylight, amidst the hush of a crowd, a sound not to be mistaken for any other, and which chills the very soul of the chance hearer, while it so often gives a momentary consolation to the mourner. Mrs. Murray bowed down her old head, weeping at the sound of her husband's prayer, which was too far off to be heard. But Miss Jean kept gazing, her bright little eyes shining out of her head, her cap pressed closely against the window.

"New-fangled ways—new-fangled ways!" she was saying to herself. "What the better is the poor body for all that praying? The lad's soul is beyond the power of prayer. He's in his Maker's hand. He was but an ill young lad, and I'm glad for your sake that the doctor has nothing to say about things that can never be known till all's known. I cannot abide these changes. I approved Marjory when she threw in her lot with the old Kirk, though brought up otherwise; but I do not approve of changing auld forms and ways to make them like anither

ritual. No, no; that's not a thing I can approve. But half Fife is there," she added, with a long-drawn breath of satisfaction, "I am thankful to think that the family is not letten down, whatever happens. There's Lord Largo himself, or I'm sore mistaken, and all the family from Magusmoor. It shows great respect—great respect. Thomas Heriot may be proud; there's men there that would not have come so far for King or Commons. I'm thankful myself to see that real old friendship aye lasts. Marjory being there is the only eyesore to me. She should have stayed at home. Women should bide at home. It would have set her better to have learned a lesson to her young sister how life's uncertain and death's sure."

"Poor bairn! she will learn that soon enough."

Miss Jean made no reply. She leant her chin upon her cane, and kept looking out, the slight tremulous movement of her head communicating a certain vibration to all the outline of her figure and black drapery. Her mind was intent upon the different groups standing about against the grey churchyard wall, bareheaded under the sun. One by one she recognised them, with her keen eyes. She had known them and their fathers and grandfathers before them, every one. The central group of all was perhaps that which the old woman noted least. She had been grieved for "the family" chiefly because Tom was the heir, and the property must now go to the second son, a thing which was unknown in the Heriot traditions. But her grief was short and soon exhausted, as perhaps every

strong sentiment is at her age. She no longer thought of Tom, nor of his desolate father, for whom at first she had been very sorry. What she was principally concerned with, was to see that all was done as it ought to be done, and that nowhere was there any failure of "respect." And on this point she had been fully satisfied, so that the effect upon her mind, as she sat at the Manse window, was rather one of deep and sombre gratification than of grief.

"Thomas Heriot may be proud," she repeated to herself, and she was sincerely unconscious of any incongruity in the thought.

"There's a man there I never saw before," she added, after a pause, "standing closer to my nephew Thomas Heriot and that old fool, Charlie, than a stranger should be. If he was a chief mourner he could not be nearer. If any of them had any sense they would see that was my Lord Largo's place. After the near friends comes the highest rank. I wonder what Thomas can be thinking of; and I would like to know who is yon man."

"It is Mr. Fanshawe, poor Tom's friend," said Mrs. Murray, with a half-restrained sob, "that nursed him when he had the accident, and sent for them, and has been the kindest friend. It was him that brought Mr. Heriot down, heart-broken as he was. Marjory could never have done it without him, as I hear. Mrs. Simpson was over," added the old lady, apologetically, afraid of seeming to know better than "a relation," "to settle about some of the servants' mourning, and it was from her I heard."

"Marjory could never have done it!" said Miss Jean, with some scorn. "If Marjory is at the bottom of everything, she should learn better than to make difficulties. When a woman sets up for being helpless, she can aye get help; but when she sets up for being the mainspring of everything, she has to give up such pretences. Marjory could not have done without him— He's come to help Marjory, has he? I know what that means. For once in their lives the Heriots are going to show a little judgment and marry Marjory. In that way ye can understand yon stranger being so near."

"Oh, Miss Jean, God forgive you!" said Mrs. Murray. "Why should you judge the worst? It is nothing of the sort."

"I'll keep my opinion, and you'll keep yours," said Miss Jean, grimly. "Am I blaming them? The girls that have been born Heriots have never had anything done for them. Every thing for the lads; for the lasses they took their chance. If a good man came, good and well; if it was but an indifferent man, they did what they liked—took him or not according to their fancy; as may be well seen, for all the daughters have married badly, everyone, except those that did not marry at all. Na, na, I'm not blaming them. There's even myself; if my father and my brother had taken an interest—if they had put themselves out of their way—I might have had bairns and grandbairns of my own, and held up my head as high as any. But I was left a motherless thing to do what I liked, to refuse good offers, and act like a fool, and throw away my pro-

spects before I knew what they meant. If Thomas Heriot is taking more thought for his girrl, it's no' from me that he'll have any blame."

"Poor man!" said the Minister's wife, "this is not a moment to expect him to take much thought."

"It's a moment when it's very important to do all he can for Marjory," said Miss Jean tartly. "There's Tom gone, poor lad, that was not steady enough to marry; and if anything was to happen to Thomas, I ask you what would become of that girrl? A girrl always brought up to be mistress and mair? The property goes to young Chairles, and he's married to a strange woman that nobody knows; and what would become of Marjory? She'll rule the roost no more as she's done all her life; she'll drop into Mr. Heriot of Pitcomlie's sister, and *I* know what that means."

"She has been Mr. Heriot of Pitcomlie's daughter all her life, and desired no better," said Mrs. Murray.

"Oh, ay, but that's very different. She'll want for nothing," said Miss Jean, reflectively, "she'll have plenty to live on. She'll have her own little money and old Charlie's money, and mine when I go; but she'll be of no more consequence in the countryside—no more consequence than——me," said the old lady. "No' so much, for you're all feared for me. It will be a terrible downcome for Marjory. No, no, if her father thinks of marrying her to Tom's friend, or anybody's friend, that can give her a good house over her head and a position, it's not from me that he'll get any blame."

"Oh, Miss Jean, it's little such thoughts are in any of their heads," said Mrs. Murray. "Mr. Heriot's heart's broken; he thinks neither of marrying nor giving in marriage. Eh, poor man! poor man! he's turning away now, leaving the grave, leaving his first-born out there in the rain and the snow, and the hot sun and winter wind. I've done it myself. I know what it is. God help him! He's thinking neither of marrying nor of Marjory. He's thinking but of him that's gone."

"He should do his duty to the living whoever's gone," said Miss Jean, watching with her sharp old eyes. "And Thomas Heriot's sore failed," she added to herself, eagerly looking out as the melancholy procession turned to the gate close by the Manse where the carriages were waiting. "He is sore failed. I should not be surprised if he was not long for this world; and then what will that girrl do?"

CHAPTER VIII.

Edward Fanshawe, the individual whose appearance at Tom Heriot's funeral had excited Miss Jean's curiosity so strongly, was, perhaps, about the last man in England to whom Mr. Heriot of Pitcomlie, or any other father, would have confided his daughter's happiness. Almost all that could be said in his favour was negative. There was no harm in him. He had never been involved in any discreditable transaction; he had wronged nobody; he had not even bored his friends. A certain fine instinct, indeed, in this respect, possessed the man; he had no high moral qualities, no principles to speak of, no plan of life nor rule of action; but he was never a bore. He perceived, with the quickness of lightning, the moment when his friends had had enough of him. Perhaps that moment arrived simultaneously with the moment in which he felt that he had enough of them; anyhow, he chose it with the most admirable exactitude. It was the one great quality of his character; he was like the sun in Hood's poem, which "never came an hour too soon," and he never stayed a moment too late.

Mr. Fanshawe was always agreeable, sympathetic, ready to interest himself in what interested those about him; he was a gentleman of the best blood and connections—cousin to Lord Strange-

ways, once removed, and allied by the mother's side to the Duchess of Dimsdale, whose name is a sufficient guarantee, we trust, for any man's gentility. He had just the amount of family and of money which is best adapted to demoralize a man, and turn him away from the natural and wholesome channels of use. And at the same time he had no land, no local habitation to keep up, no duties to do. What he had was in money, which a careful father had so locked up that the poor fellow could not even ruin himself by spending everything, and thus give himself the chance of a new start. He could only forestall his income, which he did continually, with more or less painful consequences to himself, and no great harm to anybody else; for he was weak-minded enough to have a prejudice in favour of paying his debts, though he seldom did it until considerably after date. He was not a fool, any more than he was a rogue; he was the very best, gentlest, most amiable, kind, and harmless of good-for-nothings; but a good-for-nothing he was. He had no vices, not even that of active selfishness, which, in such a man, might have been the first step to virtue. He was a little over thirty, but felt as if he had never been any younger, and never would be any older. He was not appalled by the thought of all the openings in life which he had thrown aside; or of the men who had passed him on the way, or of the advantages he had let slip. The past did not upbraid him, neither did the future alarm him. He never thought of asking himself what was to become of him when

his active manhood began to droop. "To-morrow shall be as to-day," he said to himself; or rather he did not say it, for he never went so far as to have any talk with himself on the subject.

Fanshawe had rooms in London, where he appeared generally for a portion of the season. He had been in the habit of meeting Tom Heriot in Leicestershire for the hunting, just as he was in the habit of meeting certain other kinds of men, periodically, in other places. By means of thus dividing his year, and keeping to the regular routine of change, of which men without any duties make a kind of fantastic duty for themselves, his acquaintance was simply unlimited. He knew all kinds of people, and most of the people whom he knew, he knew intimately. This was how Tom Heriot and he had become friends—friends by accident as it were, by the mere fact of meeting year after year in the same place, doing the same thing at the same moment. They had been intimates, but no more friends than this implies, at the moment when Tom, by Fanshawe's side, was struck by the stroke of that grim unsuspected Death which hovers about the hunting-field. It was Fanshawe who helped to lift him, to disengage him from his fallen horse, and carry him to the bed which turned out to be his death-bed. And the two nights of watching which followed made Fanshawe something like Tom Heriot's brother, made him the benefactor of Tom Heriot's family, the object of their warmest gratitude, and connected for ever with poor Tom's name and memory. Nothing could be more real than this con-

nexion, and yet nothing could be more accidental or arbitrary.

The position was quite false, for he knew in reality but little of Tom, and yet it was perfectly natural and true, for he had been to Tom in his hour of need all that a brother could have been; and to Tom's father and sister this stranger was no more a stranger; he was a son, a brother, "Tom's dearest friend." And it seemed only natural to both parties that Fanshawe should accompany the mournful *cortége* to Pitcomlie — and that he who had watched Tom so tenderly should help to lay him in his grave, should support his fellow-watchers, and do what he could to console his friend's family.

This had seemed perfectly natural to Fanshawe, who was ever sympathetic and ready to help. Besides, Scotland was not to him an unknown place. He had gone to the North often enough, to shooting boxes and castles among the moors. Scotland meant game and deer-stalking, mountains and lochs, and vigorous exercise, according to his understanding. Of course he was well enough aware that April is not the moment for such delights. He must have known too that no delights were possible in the circumstances, and that his goodnature was about to plunge him into a new kind of experience, and not a cheerful one. But yet if he ever paused to think where he was going, he was of opinion that he knew perfectly what the manner of living was. And it may be supposed that to such a man it was strange and somewhat overpowering to find himself at the end of a few days stranded as it were on the quietest

coast, in the midst of the most tranquil rural life, in a sorrowful house where there were no visitors, no amusements, nothing going on, nothing to see.

The sombre excitement of the arrival, and of the funeral, had for the first moment cast a veil over the gravest aspect of this seclusion. Half of Fife, as Miss Jean truly said, had shown their "respect" to the heir of Pitcomlie, and this fact had kept the stranger from perceiving the dead calm that awaited him. It was on the Sunday afternoon that he first discovered what it was that he had fallen into. He had gone decorously to the parish church in the morning, with that amount of information respecting its simple forms and ceremonies which the moors and the grouse have communicated to the well-meaning and inquisitive English sportsman. And though we will not say that Mr. Fanshawe's mind was not visited by a momentary surprise that no part of the service was in Gaelic, he yet got through that part of the day well enough; and then he returned with the family to luncheon, a meal which was eaten almost in silence and at which he first fully realised the state of affairs.

The first Sunday is a painful moment for people in fresh grief. Mr. Heriot sat at the foot of his table, sombre, incapable of speech, with his head bent upon his breast, answering mechanically, but sometimes with flashes of painful irritation, when he was addressed. Marjory from time to time attempted to talk; but the tears would come into her eyes in the midst of a sentence, her lip would quiver, and the words die away. Little Milly, with

her hair more golden-bright than ever over her black frock, sat with great eyes opened upon the visitor, ready to cry every time that Marjory's voice faltered; and Uncle Charles, who sat beside the child, was checked by some irritable word from his brother whenever he began to speak. Thus Mr. Fanshawe found himself sadly out of place in the family sitting-room downstairs.

He went up into his room after lunch, and took down all the books out of the shelves, and looked at them one after another; then he made an excursion round the room, and looked at all the pictures. There were some prints of well-known pictures which he knew as well as his A B C, and there were some childish portraits of the Heriots, one of poor Tom, which he could recognise, and of another boy, and of a round-faced girl with curls, who, no doubt, was Marjory. This was very mild fare; he sat down at the window afterwards, with a copy of Milton, which was the liveliest reading he could find, and read a few lines or Comus, and looked out upon the sea. Soon the monotonous chant of the waves attracted him, and he made his way through the silence and the sunshine downstairs, meeting no one, hearing no sound, feeling as if the house itself was dead or enchanted.

The weather was very fine, as warm as it often is in Scotland in June, though it was still only April. The Firth was blue as the sky above it, but of a deepened and darker tone; the rich brown cliffs stood out in strong relief with every inequality defined against that dazzling background. In the

distance the opposite coast glimmered in the hazy brightness, marking itself by the white creamy edge of surf upon the rocks; and looming to the westward through a haze of mingled smoke and sunshine, stood Arthur's Seat, like a muffled sentinel watching over the half-apparent towers and roofs of Edinburgh. The scene was fine enough to have attracted even a less susceptible gazer; and Fanshawe, though he was a good-for-nothing, had an eye for beauty. He sat down upon the cliff beyond the old house of Pitcomlie, half-way down, where the sea-side turf was all broken with bits of projecting rock. The salt spray dashed upon the red rocks underneath — whitest white and bluest blue, and russet brown of the richest tone, put in with all nature's indifference to crudity of colour, made up the foreground; and the distant line of the opposite coast, the vague shadow of Tantallon, the Bass rock, lying like a great pebble on the water, the great hill in the distance, with its ridges glimmering through the smoke of the unseen town, lent many a suggestion, human fulness of imagery, mystery and depth to the landscape.

Fanshawe was fully capable of appreciating the beauty of the scene; but when he had taken in all its beauty, another thought crept upon him which was very natural. The broad estuary before him was all but deserted; only a few distant ships nearer Leith broke the blue as it shaded off into the distance. The Comlie boats were all safe in harbour, the fishermen taking their Sabbath ease; one or two white sails were dropping down the western coast,

disappearing round St. Abb's Head into the grey-blue horizon; but nothing was visible nearer, except the high white cliffs of the May, the lighthouse island, which he had already watched from his window. Nothing to do! nothing that could even suggest a passing hope of amusement. After a while he looked upon the scene with dismay; it was as blank to him as a beautiful face in stone. Then he climbed to the top of the cliff, and looked out across the rich flat homely country. These well-laboured fields were a thousand times better for Mr. Heriot's rent-roll than if they had been picturesquely intersected by green lanes and waving hedgerows; but they were blank, blank to the soul of the strange visitor who found himself stranded in this noiseless place. Not a sound seemed to exist in that quiet country, except the murmur of the sea. Mr. Fanshawe said to himself spitefully that it was Scotch Sabbatarianism which prevented the very birds from singing, which chased away all rural sights and sounds, which swept the boats from the sea, and which demanded one monotonous level of dulness —dulness dead as death. And then this horrible question occurred to him: Was he sure it would be any better to-morrow? He was not at all sure; he conjured up before him other scenes of rural life which he had known; stray visits to his relatives, which he had paid at long intervals, when he had found the decorations of the church the only amusement and a school-feast the only dissipation; and here, in grim Scotland, there were not even these simple elements of pleasure. Mr. Fanshawe's heart

died within him as he gazed over that rich, well-ploughed country-side.

If it should occur to anyone that this mood was very inappropriate to the really sympathetic nature of one who had watched over Tom Heriot's sick-bed, and had grieved over, and fully felt the frightful blow which his death had given to the family so near at hand, we can but say in reply that even to the most sympathetic the impression produced by death is the one that is effaced most rapidly. Already Fanshawe had felt, with that impatience which is natural to humanity, that enough had been given to Tom. He could not and would not have expressed the sentiment in words; but it was a natural sentiment. Mr. Heriot's heart-broken despondency, which was partly veiled and partly heightened by the irritability of grief, overawed the young man; but already he had begun to feel it hard upon him that Marjory, for instance, should refuse to be comforted. He himself felt healed of his momentary wound; and why did not she begin at least to allow herself to be healed also?

It seemed to Fanshawe, as it seems to all except the chief sufferers in every such bereavement, that it is churlish and almost fictitious to "give way"—and that the natural thing is to get better of your grief as you do of a headache, or, at least, not to annoy and worry other people, by letting them see that it is continually there. He had felt it very much at the time, but he had got over it; and it seemed natural to him that others should get over it also. And when he met Mr. Charles and Milly

coming very solemnly hand in hand round the corner of the old house, their gravity seemed almost a personal affront to him.

"The child is but a child," he said to himself; "and the old fellow is only his uncle. Much my uncle would care if I were to die! Really this is making too great a fuss," and a certain air of disapproval came into the look with which he met them. "Going to take a walk?" he said.

"We were going down to the foot of the cliff," said Mr. Charles. "This little thing is pale, and wants the air; will you come too? It is not very high, but the cliff is bold, and I am fond of the place. No scenery, you know, no scenery," said Mr. Charles, waving his hand towards the rocks with an air of protecting pride. "A poor thing, Sir, but mine own," was the sentiment with which he gazed at the brown headland, the angle of the coast upon which his paternal house was placed; "but to us who were born here, it has a beauty of its own."

"It has a great deal of beauty," said Fanshawe; "but of a desolate kind. To look out upon a sea without even a boat—"

"There are plenty of boats sometimes," said Mr. Charles, somewhat hastily; "you would not have the fishers out on the Sunday, unless when there's some special necessity?—a great haul of herring, or such like—good food that should not be wasted, might excuse it; but without that there's no reason. There are plenty of ships in Leith Harbour, and lying beyond Inchkeith as you would see when we crossed the Firth—"

As these words were said, Mr. Charles suddenly recollected how he had crossed the Firth last, a mourner bringing poor Tom to his burial; and he added hastily, "We were not thinking much of what we saw at such a sorrowful time; but still the ships were there."

"Is Mr. Heriot fond of yachting?" said Fanshawe, taking no notice of this dolorous conclusion. "A yacht would be a resource."

"The boys had once a boat," said Mr. Charles. "You must pardon us for our uncheerful ways. There is not a thing about but what is connected with his memory. They had a boat when they were quite young, before Charlie went to India. I am not fond of the sea myself; it's a very precarious pleasure; and to run the risk of your life for an hour's sail seems a want of sense and a waste of strength."

"Shouldn't you like to go to the May, Milly?" said Fanshawe, pointing to the white cliffs of the island, which seemed on this clear day to be but a few fathoms off the shore. A sparkle of pleasure came into Milly's little face; her big blue eyes lighted up; the corners of her mouth, which had seemed permanently depressed, rose like the corners of an unbent bow.

"Oh!" she began; and then paused and looked at her uncle, and became melancholy once more.

Milly was like Fanshawe, she had had enough of the family grief; but she was too dutiful to break its bond.

"The May is not so near as it seems," said Mr.

Charles. "It's very dangerous in some tides; the landing is bad. Our fishers themselves are far from fond of the May. And, altogether, our coast is not a coast for pleasure-sailing. There are accidents enough among those who cannot help themselves, poor fellows! Many a tragedy I have known on Comlie Shore."

"But if there is no yachting," said Fanshawe, with momentary forgetfulness of his good-breeding, "how do you get through the time—at least in Summer—if you spend it here?"

Mr. Charles looked at him with suppressed offence. A man who found Pitcomlie dull was to the Heriots the concentration of impertinence and bad taste. Little Milly looked up, too, with her wondering eyes. Milly did not know what to make of this man, who was not quite in harmony, she felt, with the surroundings, yet who made suggestions which were very delightful, and who had the melancholy and splendid distinction of being "poor Tom's friend." She was afraid he was going to be scolded, and was sympathetic; yet how could Uncle Charles scold a grown up gentleman, who was Tom's friend? Thus orderly age and dutiful childhood looked surprised at one who was beyond all the bonds familiar to them, and whose time and whose life seemed of so little importance to himself.

"My time seldom hangs heavy on my hands," said Mr. Charles. "If you live to my age, you will learn that time is short—far too short for what a man has to do. I am sixty, and the days run through my hands like sea-sand. Many and many

is the thing I have to put aside for want of time; and most likely I'll die with heaps of odds and ends left incomplete."

"I don't see any reason," said Fanshawe, in his levity; "at sixty it appears to me you have much more certainty of life before you than at half the age. A man who lives till sixty may surely live to a hundred if he pleases. By that time all the dangers must be over."

"And I suppose," said Mr. Charles, not quite pleased to hear his sixty years treated so lightly, "you hope to do as much yourself."

"I don't know," said the young man, laughing and shrugging his shoulders. "Seriously, do you think it's worth the while? I am more than half way, and it has not been so delightful. No; a short life and a merry one must be the best."

"That was poor Tom's idea," said Mr. Charles, with the look of a man who is improving the occasion.

His own feeling was that no sermon could have pointed a sharper moral. At the sound of Tom's name, little Milly began to cry; not that she knew very much of Tom, but the vague pain and sorrow which filled the house had made his name the emblem of everything that was melancholy and grievous to her. Milly's tears gave the last aggravation to Fanshawe's impatience.

"Poor Tom!" he cried; "he had a merry life. Better thirty years of that than a long, dull blank, with nothing particular in it. He thought so, and so should I. I don't like—forgive me for saying so—to think of poor Heriot as a warning. On the

whole, I should not object to the same sort of end. Better that than to drink the cup to the dregs—"

"As I am doing, you mean," said Mr. Charles.

"No, indeed—far from that. As I should do, if such were to be my fate. It depends, I suppose, upon the groove one gets into," said Fanshawe, with a short, uneasy laugh.

And then he began to talk hurriedly to Milly about the chances of a voyage to the May.

"I do not understand that young man," said Mr. Charles, privately, to Marjory. "May, my dear, you must try your hand. There is good about him. If there had not been good about him, he would never have done what he did for Tom. But he thinks Pitcomlie dull, and he thinks a long life undesirable. I should like to understand the lad; and as we all have cause to be grateful to him, I wish you would try your hand."

"If you wish it, uncle," said Marjory.

This was in the silence of the evening, when she sat by the window, looking out at the flush of sunset which still dyed all the western sky, and lit up the Firth with crimson and gold. Milly stood close by her, with an arm round her neck. The child had said her hymn, and discharged all her Sunday duties. She was vaguely sad, because the others were sad—yet satisfied in that she had fulfilled all personal requirements; and over Marjory, too, a sense of quiet had stolen. The dead were in their graves and at rest; the living remained, with work, and tears, and dying all before them. She talked softly to Uncle Charles as the sunset lights faded,

feeling an indescribable quiet come over her mind as the twilight came over the earth. Only Mr. Heriot sat alone in the library, with his head bent on his breast, doing nothing, reading nothing; thinking over the same thoughts for hours together. The old father felt that he had come to an end; but for the others it was not so: the pause in their lives was over, and existence had begun again.

CHAPTER IX.

NEXT morning life began as usual for the saddened household. Breakfast, which had once been so lively a meal, passed over in comparative silence. Mr. Charles, indeed, did what he could to talk to the stranger, making conversation about the news and the newspapers, with a vague hope of enlivening the party.

"I daresay, as an Englishman, you don't know much about Scotch affairs, Mr. Fanshawe," he said. "If we were an ill-conditioned people like the Irish now, we might lead Parliament a pretty dance; but as we find it more to our advantage to keep quiet and mind our own business, nobody puts themselves out of the way."

"And then you are very well off, which Ireland is not," said Fanshawe, who had Irish blood in his veins.

"I am not so sure about that. We have our grievances like other folk. Our affairs are thrust to the wall for every kind of nonsense. Who cares to come when it's a Scotch night, or when Scotch affairs are to be discussed? A handful of Scotch members—"

"It is like everything else," said Mr. Heriot, breaking in harshly; "even, if you come to that, who are our Scotch members? In the very next

county one of our best men was turned out the other day, to make room for some English radical or other. They hire our houses, they shoot our moors, they clear the fish out of our rivers, they treat us like a hunting-ground. Our old habits are destroyed, our old families dying out—"

"Not so bad as that, not so bad as that," said Mr. Charles, soothingly. "You see, Mr. Fanshawe, we're proud, and we think a retired English tradesman, though an excellent man—a most excellent man, perhaps better than half the Lairds about—is out of his proper place in our old castles. But still they bring money into the country, no doubt about that, and it's good for trade and all the rest of it. By the way, I see there's been a great match at St. Andrews—did you notice, Thomas?—with Tom Morris in it. We must take you to St. Andrews, Mr. Fanshawe, to see golf. You cannot say you know Scotland unless you know golf. Bless my life, what a long time it is since I have been there—not once all last season. What did you say, Thomas?—that is a most unusual thing for me."

"I said nothing," said Mr. Heriot. "Go to your golf, whatever happens, Charlie. Golf over your best friend's grave, if you like. What does it matter? He would never feel it, you may be sure."

Poor Mr. Charles and his attempts at conversation were thus cut short wheresoever he turned his steps.

"I mean no disrespect," he said, with a certain humility, looking anxiously at his brother, who sat

throned in the irritability of his sorrow, strangely pale through the brownness of his country colour, or rather grey—with a veil over his countenance such as had never been seen on it before. His heavy eyebrows were curved over the eyes, which shone out fiery and red from under them, red with sleeplessness, and nervous irritation, and unshed tears.

"It is nothing to me," he said, in a high-pitched unsteady voice, "nothing to me! Let them amuse themselves that can. I am glad of it. Has Charlie been written to yet—that is all I want to know."

"I wrote on Friday, papa."

"Ah! before the funeral," said Mr. Heriot, "to let him know what had happened. But I mean more than that. I mean that he should be written to, to come home. I want him home. Why should he stay out there now, risking his health and his children's lives? Write again, and say I want him home."

"Yes, papa," said Marjory, gently. "I said so then. I gave him all your messages. I said to come at once, as soon as Mrs. Charles could travel—"

"Confound Mrs. Charles! what do I care for Mrs. Charles?" cried the old man. And then he paused, and turned with a curious attempt at a smile to Fanshawe. "You'll think I am a hot-headed old Turk, but you see how I am baffled by my family. I give a simple message, and it's lost in a hundred paraphrases. Mrs. Charles may come when she pleases. I want Charlie. Do you hear,

May? Write again this very day, and say I want him home."

"Yes, papa, immediately, as soon as breakfast is over."

"I knew there would be something to wait for," said Mr. Heriot, rising up, impatiently. He was consumed by his grief as by a fire. The presence of any other individual, even those most dear to him, the sound of conversation, seemed to rouse into a kind of fury the smouldering heat in his soul. And when they dropped into silence he was still more impatient. "I fear I am a hindrance to conversation," he said, pushing away his chair from the table after a painful pause. "I'll *levo l'incomodo*, as the Italians say. If anyone wants me, I'm in the library. And mind that Charlie is written to without more delay."

So saying, he went out hastily, with a heavy step, which yet sounded uncertain upon the floor, as if it might stumble over anything. He waved his hand to Fanshawe, with a forced smile, as he disappeared. He met his darling Milly at the door —she whom he had never passed without a caress, and brushed by, taking no notice of her. Then he came back, and looked into the room sternly.

"See that there's no mistake about Charlie," he repeated.

Marjory made an ineffectual effort to restrain the tears which fell suddenly, in great drops, upon her sleeve. She, too, turned anxious apologetic looks upon the stranger.

"He never was like this before," she said. "Oh,

don't think he is rude or unkind, Mr. Fanshawe. There never was anyone so good or so tender; but his heart is broken. He can think of nothing but poor Tom."

"And you'll write to Charlie?" said Mr. Charles. "I don't wonder at him being anxious. If you'll think what India is, and what the life is—a life made up of accidents, and fevers, and everything that's deadly. The lad might be bitten by some venomous creature; some ill beast might fall foul of him; or he might catch the jungle fever, which they tell me is most dangerous—"

"But all this might have happened to him for years past, I suppose," said Fanshawe; "unless he went to India very recently. These dangers are not new."

"He was not the heir then!" said Mr. Charles very simply; and he too rose from the table. "Would you like to come and see my room, Mr. Fanshawe? There is not much to show, but I have some prints that are not just what you will see every day, and a curiosity or two; while Marjory writes her letters." And as he left the room he too looked back to say: "You'll write at once, May; you'll be very urgent? It will be good for us all to have Charlie at home."

"Oh, May!" cried little Milly, who did not remember her second brother; "why are they so anxious for Charlie to come home?"

"Who is anxious, Milly, besides papa and Uncle Charles?"

"Oh, the whole house!" said Milly. "Mrs.

Simpson asks me every time she sees me; and old Fleming. 'Mr. Charlie must come home now!' they say. May, will you tell me why?"

"To fill Tom's place!" said Marjory, with an outburst of sudden tears. "Oh, my little Milly, that is what we do even when we love best. My father is breaking his heart for Tom; yet he wants Charlie to fill Tom's place."

"Nobody could ever fill *your* place, May," cried Milly; "I would never let them; dinna cry. I could cry too, for papa never minds me, never looks at me; and oh, he's so strange; the house is so strange! but May, so long as there is you—"

The little girl's arms clinging round her neck were a comfort to Marjory. Little Milly was wounded too; she had received that first lesson of her own unimportance, which is hard even for a child; she was half indignant, half angry even with "poor Tom," though she cried at the sound of his name—and very sore about Charlie, whom everybody wished for.

"They have May, and what do they want more?" this faithful little maiden said to herself. "When Tom was living we never saw him; and nobody ever thought of Charlie. Why do they make such a fuss now? when they have May!"

Fanshawe went with Mr. Charles to his room. After the scene of the morning he felt sadly out of place, an intruder into the family life. It seemed to him that he ought to go away; and only the day before he had felt the tediousness of the existence so much that any excuse for going away would

have seemed a godsend; but yet, at the same time, he felt that he did not want to go. Why, he could not have told; he seemed to have been caught in the web of this family's life, to be waiting for some *dénouement* or for some new turn in the story. He had known nothing of them two weeks before; yet now he was a member of the household, a spectator of the father's misery, of the effort of the family to right itself after this terrible blow. They seemed all to be playing their parts before him, while he was the judge chance had appointed to decide how they all fulfilled their *rôle*. With this curious sensation in his mind he went over Mr. Charles's treasures—his prints, his cabinets of coins, his little collection of old jewellery, which he had ranged in boxes under glass covers. "Here is a necklace that I sometimes lend to May," the old man said, pointing out a delicate circlet in fine enamel, and the lightest fairy goldsmith's work. "It was brought to her great grandmother, Leddy Pitcomlie, from Rome, in the beginning of last century, and is said to have belonged to a line of great Italian beauties, whom I need not name. They're all written out on the case. I can recollect seeing it on the old Leddy's withered neck."

"Then you had a title in the family in those days?"

"No, no; no title! Leddy is the feminine of Laird, in old Scots—not Lady, mind, which has another meaning. This is a ring that belonged to Robert Hay in the end of the fifteenth century. We bear the yoke still in our arms, you see. Robert

Hay, of the Erroll family, married the heiress of Pitcomlie—who was Marjory, like our Marjory downstairs. It's a romance in its way. I have put together some of the facts in the shape of a kind of family history; but whether it will ever see the light of day—"

"Then you are an author, as well as an antiquary?" said Fanshawe; "and an art collector; and all sorts of learned things besides. What an impudent wretch I was to speak of dulness here!"

Mr. Charles blushed, and waved his hand in gentle deprecation.

"No more of an author than I am of an antiquary," he said; "a bit smattering here and there, that's all the knowledge I possess. As for my bits of family notes, I doubt if they would interest any but the family and connections. We have never had any notabilities among us; good, honest, ordinary folk; some soldiers that have done well in their day, but never very remarkable; and some clever women—that's been our speciality. You may see it in Marjory at the present moment. Clever women—I don't mean authoresses, or that kind of cattle, but real capable mothers of families, that could guide their house and rule their children. We've been great for that. Here are some miniatures that, perhaps, will interest you; some very good, some bad enough, but all the same character, the same character running through them. There is one you would say was done for May, and it's her great-aunt I don't know how many times removed."

Thus the old man chattered, leading the stranger from one corner to another of his domain. Mr. Charles's rooms were in the habitable corner of the old house of Pitcomlie, which was connected with the new house by a long corridor, a windy passage, with the garden on one side and the cliff on the other. One wing of the old building had been preserved in sufficient repair, and Mr. Charles's study occupied the round of the old tourelle, as well as part of the ancient front of the house. It was a large, cheerful room, with many windows, which he had fitted up according to his taste, and his taste was good. His writing-table stood in the round of the little tower commanding views up and down the Firth. All the wonderful panorama on which Fanshawe had gazed with so much interest from the cliffs, unfolded itself round the old windows which were set in the half-circle of the tower. Between these windows Mr. Charles had placed frames of crimson velvet, set with miniatures, with rare old prints, and with small but exquisite scraps of sketches. Only a trained eye, indeed, could have divined the amount of modest wealth contained upon these; delightful faces, lovely little scraps of scenery, gems which nothing could replace, though to the ignorant they seemed simple enough.

Fanshawe felt himself grow smaller and smaller as he looked. After all, this was not the dull and level blank of existence he had supposed. This homely old man, with his Scotch accent, changed under his eyes; he became something a great deal more lofty and elevated than Mr. Charles. In his

compunction and shame, the young man went as far too high in his second estimate as he had been too low in his first. As for Mr. Charles, this change gave him a simple satisfaction which it was delightful to behold.

"You see, after all, there are some things worth looking at in Pitcomlie," he said. "It is not such a humdrum house, after all, though it stands in a county so little interesting as comfortable Fife."

"Nothing could have made it a humdrum house," said the penitent. He was not thinking of Mr. Charles's pictures: he was thinking of—something else.

Just then an unexpected summons came to the door.

"Miss Heriot's compliments, and would the gentleman step over to the north room?" the maid said, who waited, curtseying, to show the way.

Mr. Charles's countenance clouded over.

"That's poor Tom's room," he said. "I'll go with the gentleman myself—and yet, no; on second thoughts I'll not go. You two may have something to consult about, that I should not meddle with; or Marjory may think there is something. Go, as she has sent for you, Mr. Fanshawe; you can come back to me another time."

With a curious little thrill of interest, Fanshawe went, threading the turret staircase down from Mr. Charles's rooms, and the windy passages, wondering what she could want with him. Marjory received him in a room of a very different description. It was in the back of the house, looking across the

gardens to the level line of the ploughed land, and the low hills on the horizon. It was a long, narrow room, with a door opening from each end; and its decorations were of a kind as different from Mr. Charles's study as was its form. On the walls hung two crossed swords, some old guns carefully arranged according to their antiquity, a collection of whips, fishing-rods, clubs for playing golf—worn out traces of a boyhood not yet so very long departed. In one corner was a bookcase, full of old classics, thumbed and worn, the school-books of the two boys whose progress in polite letters Pitcomlie had once been so proud of. The pictures on the walls were of the most heterogeneous character; languishing French "Etudes" in chalk, were mingled with sporting subjects, heads of dogs, portraits of sleek race-horses led by sleeker grooms, and one staring view of Pitcomlie, painted in water-colours, with very lively greens and blues, and signed "Ch. Hay-Heriot," in bold boyish characters.

No contrast could have been greater than this mass of incongruous elements, seen after the careful collection of Mr. Charles; and yet this, too, was not without its attraction. It looked like the chaos of a boy's mind, a hopeless yet innocent confusion; all sorts of discordant things connected together by the sweet atmosphere of youth and possibility, out of which all harmonies might come. In the midst of this schoolboy chamber sat Marjory. She had a writing-case placed before her on a table, the key of which she held in her hand. Fanshawe recognised it at once. It was one which Tom had

used constantly, which he had carried about with him everywhere. Tom's sister looked up at him with a wistful and anxious glance.

"Mr. Fanshawe," she said, "this has been brought to me to open. My father cannot bear to look at anything, and I—I feel as if we had no right to search into his secrets. It seems dishonourable, when he cannot defend himself—when he is in our power."

Fanshawe went round to Marjory's side, and took into his own the hand which, half unconsciously, she held out, appealing to him, and touched the fingers with his lips. Her eyes were full of tears, and the look she turned to him, asking for counsel and sympathy, went to his very heart. A slight colour came to her face at this answer to her appeal; but Marjory was not vain, and took it in no other light than as an impulse of sympathy.

"Must I do it?" she asked.

"Is there any reason why? is it necessary? must *you* do it?" he asked. "Miss Heriot, your brother was but a man like others. There may be things he would not have had you see."

Once more Marjory blushed; but this time more hotly. She drooped her head not to look at him.

"That is what I thought," she said, very low. Then after a pause, she looked up suddenly in his face. "Mr. Fanshawe, you were his friend; you heard what he said about something to tell me. He thanked God at the last that he had told me, though he had not, you are aware. Do you know what it was?"

"No." It was a relief unspeakable to him to be able to say this. "I know none of his secrets—if he had any. So far as I am aware, he was irreproachable. I knew nothing of him which you might not have known."

"Thanks!" she said, with a smile, once more holding out her hand. How grateful she was to him for knowing nothing! "Do you think, if I keep it by me, to refer to in case of need—do you think that would do?"

"Or your uncle might do it," said Fanshawe.

To his astonishment, she shrank from this suggestion.

"Uncle Charles is very good and kind; but he would be hard upon poor Tom—he was always hard upon him. I must do it, if it has to be done. Must it be done? I am so unwilling to do it, that I cannot trust my own judgment. Oh! why cannot our little treasures, our secrets, our mysteries, be buried with us in our graves?"

"He may have left a will—instructions—something that concerns others," said Fanshawe, hesitating.

Miss Heriot was not perfect, or an angelical woman. She almost turned her back upon him as she answered coldly,

"Thanks; you seem to think it necessary. I will not trouble you further, Mr. Fanshawe. I am much obliged to you for your advice."

"What else could I say?" poor Fanshawe asked himself, as he retired. "What the deuce have I done? She talks as if it was my fault. I did not

kill Tom Heriot, nor lock up his secrets in his despatch box. I hope, though, she won't find anything to shock her. What do the people here mean by leaving all this to her? They give her everything to do. By Jove! if it was me she would find the difference. I should be her slave. She should do just what she liked, and so would I. I wonder if she'd like it? I mean not me, but the kind of thing—to be served instead of serving, to be kept from trouble instead of being bothered by everybody. Just for the fun of the thing I should like to know."

At this stage of his thoughts, Mr. Fanshawe being outside on the platform before the house, lighted his cigar; and then he strolled down the cliff to the rocks, where he wandered about till the hour of luncheon.

"I suppose it's best as it is," he said to himself, as he clambered up again at the sound of the bell. Such a sentiment is perhaps less contented, less satisfactory than it looks. "I suppose it's best as it is!" Certainly there was a certain ruefulness in the countenance with which it was said.

CHAPTER X.

Mr. Heriot did not come to luncheon. A tray carefully piled with everything that old Fleming could think of to tempt his master's appetite was carried to him in the library; but before the rest of the party had left the table, Fleming came back disconsolate, bearing his tray untouched.

"In case ye shouldna believe me, I've brought it back, Miss Marjory," he said, with an injured air, approaching the young mistress of the house. "Look at it with your ain e'en, and maybe then ye'll believe me. No a thing tasted, no more nor he did yesterday, and me sent away for an auld bletherin' scoondrel. An auld bletherin' scoondrel! Man and boy I've been in the house o' Pitcomlie forty years, and it's the first time such a name was ever applied to me."

"Fleming, you must not mind," said Marjory. "My father did not mean it. It was his grief that spoke, and not he."

"Nae doubt ye ken better than me, Miss Marjory; the bairns we've brought up on our knees are aye wiser than us old folk; but he means *that*, I suppose?" said old Fleming, holding up his tray triumphantly. "And what kind of a meaning is that for the father of a family? No to take his good food that's been prepared wi' a' the care and pains

of a clean and Christian woman, that sud have been accepted wi' a grace and eaten with thanksgiving. When I mind the luncheons the Laird used to eat, the good dinners he made, the fine nat'rel appetite!" cried Fleming, almost with tears in his eyes, holding up his tray as an eloquent witness of his case, "and now to be sent away with a flea in my lug for a bletherin' scoondrel,—because I was fain to see him eat a morsel of wholesome meat!"

"Go away to your pantry, Sir, and say no more about it," said Mr. Charles, authoritatively. "Miss Marjory has plenty to put up with, without your nonsense. Your father, my dear, has been in the house for days together. He has not so much as taken a walk, he that was always afoot. That's the reason why he cannot eat; for my part, I am not surprised. He'll be better, I hope, when Charlie comes back."

"I would get the doctor," said Fleming, with stout self-assertion. "Mr. Charlie may be kept back by ill winds, or many a thing beside. I would have the doctor if it was me."

Fanshawe looked at this scene with mingled amusement and surprise; but though Mr. Charles stood up in defence of his niece, neither of them thought it strange that the old butler should have his word to say. The old man even emitted extraordinary murmurs, which were almost like groans, as he continued his attendance at table.

"I've seen death in the house afore. I've seen plenty of sore trouble; but I never saw the Laird as he is now. Waes me! waes me!" said Fleming;

and the conversation, such as it was, was interrupted by this monologue.

They all went into the drawing-room together, glad to escape from it. Mr. Charles took his three-cornered seat by the fire, and his newspaper, which he had left lying upon it. Marjory seated herself at the writing-table in the bow window. They had their natural occupations, the things they did habitually every day; but as for Fanshawe, he had no occupation to turn to. He turned over all the books on the tables, and then he went and stood at the window. The weather had changed since yesterday, which was much too bright to last. It was a true Spring day on the East coast, with a white mist closing in over land and sea, and a chill wind blowing. Was he to spend that whole long afternoon gazing at the tumbling, leaden waves, and the choking white vapour that lay heavy like a coverlet over them, and clung to the edges of the cliff like a fringe of woolly whiteness, and shut out both earth and sky?

Just then Mr. Heriot put in his head, and asked sharply,

"Have you written to Charlie?"

"Yes, papa," said Marjory, with a little start; and a minute after, Fanshawe, at the window, saw the old man go out, with his head upon his breast, to the misty cliff that lay before the windows.

He stood still there for some moments, with his tall figure relieved against the forlorn blackness of the waves and the woolly mist, his white hair and the skirts of his coat blowing in the wind; and then

he took the rocky path down the side of the cliff, which led to the beach. It seemed to be natural that he should choose such a day to go abroad in, a hopeless day, when the sun and the light were obscured, when the wind searched to the marrow of the bones, and the mist crept into the throat, and the sea moaned and complained among its rocks.

Fanshawe stood and watched him as long as he could see him. The very air and water seemed to sigh "Waes me!" like the old serving-man who loved the house.

"Mr. Fanshawe," said Marjory, from the recess, "is there anything to be done for you? We are dull, and we cannot help it. None of us are good for anything. I should like to ask you to walk with us; but it is an easterly haar, and that is bad on our coast; and riding would be still worse; and it is too late, even if the weather were not so bad, to go to St. Andrews, as Uncle Charles proposed—"

"Never mind me," said Fanshawe, with some shame. "You must think me a man of few resources, and so, I fear, I am. I am good for nothing. I have got out of the way of reading. It is a horrible confession, but it is true. The only thing that suggests itself to me on such a day is, if not to walk, yet to talk."

"Let us talk, then," said Marjory, closing the blotting-book in which she had been writing her letters.

She said it, he thought, with a sort of half contempt, as if this insignificant occupation of talk was

a kind of idleness, and beneath her ordinary activity; and then, as was natural after such a conclusion had been come to, a dead silence supervened. Mr. Fanshawe broke it with a laugh.

"I fear you despise talking," he said; "and conversation is a thing which cannot be done of *malice prepense*. May we have some music instead? There is music enough there in your case to last a lifetime, much less an afternoon."

"Music!" said Marjory, somewhat startled. "To be sure," she added, with a smile, "music is not merry-making, as our poor folk fancy. It does not need to be the voice of mirth; and now you suggest it, there are few things that would express one's feelings so well—the forlorn, confused, oppressed—" She paused, with tears rising, which got into her throat and her eyes, and stifled her words. "But I must not, Mr. Fanshawe. It would shock everybody. My poor father would think me mad, and I cannot tell what the servants would say. It would seem to them the very height of heartlessness."

"No, no," said Mr. Charles, from his corner; "no, May, my dear; no music. I could not put up with that."

Fanshawe turned away, dismayed. He felt himself the most profane, secular, troublesome intruder. Poor Tom's shadow seemed to stop up all the ordinary currents of life, and create a fictitious existence, full of impossible laws of its own for the mourners. Little Milly sat in a corner, reading—not her favourite stories, or the fairy tales which had been her constant companions, but a good book

about a little boy who died in the odour of sanctity. She was reading it with the corners of her mouth turned down, and every soft, wavy line about her stilled into angles and gravity.

Fanshawe went and sat down by her, and began to talk of that voyage, which he had once proposed, to the Isle of May. He led the child so far out of herself, that at the end of five minutes she laughed, a sound which frightened her to death, and which made both her uncle and her sister raise their eyes, as if something dreadful had happened. May said nothing, and her eyes, tearful though they were, smiled at the little creature; but Mr. Charles said in a voice which was harsh for him:—

"You forget that this is a house of mourning."

Poor Milly cried a little by way of expiating that weakness of nature, and relapsed into her good book; but Fanshawe could not cry, and had no good book to retire into. He yawned visibly, as he lay back in his low chair and contemplated his companions. He was a good-for-nothing; he had no letters to write, no studies to carry on. When he was not amused or occupied, he yawned. What else was there to do?

There is nothing which more piques a woman than this frank and unblushing *ennui*, when it makes itself visible within reach of her. Marjory felt half-insulted, half-stimulated to exertion.

"Is there nothing we can show Mr. Fanshawe?" she said, in a tone of semi-irritation. "I fear our pictures are only family-portraits, and we possess nothing that is curious. Uncle Charles has all the

rarities in the house, and those you have seen already. Should you like to go over the old hall—the ruinous part? There is not much to see."

"I should like it very much," said Fanshawe.

He did not care two straws about the old ruined Manor-house; but the thought of a *tête-à-tête* with May was pleasant to him, partly because of the vague attraction which a handsome young woman has for a young man, and partly because he was curious about her individually. She was a new species to him; he had not made her out, and the study was an agreeable kind of study. With a slight flush of impatience on her face, she had risen to lead the way; and he, secretly delighted, but perfectly demure and serious, was following, when all his satisfaction was suddenly turned into discomfiture. The door opened, and, with a tone of solemnity, Fleming entered and announced,

"Doctor and Mistress Murray."

When he had solemnly pronounced the names, giving full weight to every syllable, the old servant ranged himself by the wall, to see the effect of his announcement; he watched complacently while the visitors entered after him in panoply of woe, with looks wrought up to the requisite pitch of sympathetic solemnity. It was, as Fleming said afterwards, as good as a sermon to see the Doctor. He had come to condole, and he was fully prepared to do so. Resignation and submission—that comfortable resignation which can support with so much dignity the losses of others—was in every fold of his dress, in the lines of his composed countenance,

decently sad, but not gloomy, as became a man who sorrowed not without hope. To old Fleming, the Minister's aspect was a thorough enjoyment. It was the sort of thing which was befitting to a house of mourning; not the hot grief which refused to be comforted, and abjured food and carnal consolation, like that passion of sorrow which possessed his master; but a legitimate and subdued sentiment, which fulfilled all proprieties, and was an example to all beholders.

Mrs. Murray was not so satisfactory. She came in crying softly, and took Marjory into her arms, who—thus caught on the very verge of going out, and making an effort after amusement, was confused, as if she had been doing something amiss.

"My poor Marjory! my poor bairn!" said Mrs. Murray; while May, though the tears started from her eyes, felt as if she must cry out in self-accusation, and confess that for that moment she had not been thinking of Tom.

Then they all sat down in a circle, of which Dr. Murray was the centre. Mr. Charles had shuffled hastily out of his fireside corner, and had come forward to shake hands, with a certain solemn *empressement*, which was the proper way in which members of the family should receive such a visit. Fanshawe stole away behind backs, and sat down again by little Milly; but Milly, with a dreadful recollection of that laugh, avoided him, and fixed her eyes upon the Minister—for what would happen if, under sore press of temptation, she was to make such a terrible mistake again?

"And how is your father, Miss Marjory?" said the Doctor; "far from well, I fear? He had a shaken look yesterday at church that grieved my heart to see. No doubt it is a great affliction, a very sore stroke from the Almighty; but we must remember that it is the Almighty, and that it is not our place to repine."

"No doubt, no doubt; that is true," said Mr. Charles, acquiescing solemnly.

It was a thing incumbent on him in his representative position as the only man of the house.

"I don't think my father means to repine," said Marjory. "His heart is just broken; he never thought of it—never expected such a thing as that he should live, and poor Tom be taken away!"

"And the heir, too," said the Doctor. "The ways of the Lord are very inscrutable. Just those lives that seem to us most valuable are taken. When I look round upon the world," added Dr. Murray, "and see how many people are struck just in the way that was most unexpected, most unlikely! But he has other children left, and you must do what you can to keep him from brooding. My dear Miss Marjory, a great deal is in your hands."

"I can do so little," said Marjory, with tears. "My poor father! his heart is broken. There does not seem anything that we can do."

"You must tell him to be resigned," said Dr. Murray. "I am very sorry that he is out. I should have been glad if I had been able to speak a word of comfort to my old friend and respected heritor.

You must remind him how much we have all to bear. Not one of us is without his cross. Sometimes it falls heavier on one than on another. It is his turn to-day, and it may be ours to-morrow; but none of us escape. The only one thing certain is that there must have been need of it. This mysterious and terrible dispensation has not been sent without some good end."

"No doubt, no doubt, it must be for a good purpose," said Mr. Charles.

"I cannot say how sorry I am that Mr. Heriot is not in," continued the Doctor. "I might have timed my visit differently. I had not thought it likely that he would be well enough to go out."

"He has gone down to the rocks," said Marjory, feeling that her father was put on his defence. "It is not a day to tempt any one. I think the moaning of the sea soothes him. He cannot bear conversation; we are none of us capable of much—"

"My poor child! as if anything was to be expected," said kind Mrs. Murray, drawing her aside. "I would not even have had the Doctor come so soon. I thought I might have come myself first, to give you a kiss, my dear. Oh! May, I know what it is! Tell your father my heart just bleeds for him. I'm glad he's out to take the air, though it's a dreary, dreary day; but, perhaps, in grief like his, a dreary day is the best. When it's bright, Nature seems to have no heart. The Doctor thought it was his duty to come, though it's so soon. And, my dear, tell me, has any change been thought of? what are you going to do?"

"We have sent for Charlie; that is all. What other change is there possible? I hope perhaps my father may take some comfort when Charlie comes home."

"Now that is just what I said," said Mrs. Murray, growing a little more cheerful on this argument. "Doctor, I told you they would send for Charlie. He should be home now with his bairns, to bring them up in their own country; and India's a weary place for children. You can never be happy about them. I am looking for my Mary's two eldest, poor things! It will break their mother's heart to part with them; but what can she do? Oh, yes, my dear; it will be a great happiness to me; but I cannot expect you to take any interest in that, and you in such trouble. Miss Jean is coming to-morrow to pay you her visit, May. I will say nothing to her about Charles; she will like best to hear that from you herself."

"It is quite the right thing to do," said the Doctor; "and we may be thankful that your brother Charles has always been very steady, and a married man, and all that. He will be a great comfort to you all, and a help to his father about the estate. Your father has got a great shake, Miss Marjory, and I doubt if he will ever be as strong to go about as he has been. Charles's arrival is the very best thing that could happen. Always a steady lad, and able to take his part in the management of the property. He will be a comfort to you all."

It was on Marjory's lips to say that she wanted no comfort, and that the substitution of one brother

for another gave her, on the contrary, an additional pang; but she restrained herself, and acquiesced silently, while Mr. Charles answered,

"Oh, no doubt, no doubt. Charlie will be a comfort when he comes."

And then Marjory was once more folded in Mrs. Murray's kind arms, and the doctor, with concentrated woe in his face, laid his hand upon her shoulder, and exhorted her to be resigned, as he took his leave. As the door opened, Fleming's voice was heard exhorting another visitor to enter.

"Come in, sir, come this way," said Fleming.

And Fanshawe, who stood in the recess of the bow window, watching the whole proceedings, saw a young man enter shyly and with reluctance, whose appearance somehow entirely changed the placid feelings with which he had watched the Minister and the Minister's wife. The new comer came up to Marjory with eager, though hesitating, steps; he took her hand and held it, bowing over it so deeply that the spectator asked himself, in scorn, whether the fellow meant to kiss it. He had kissed that same hand himself in respect and sympathy not very long before; but the presumption of the stranger struck him as something inexcusable.

The visitor was a slim young man, with large dark eyes, and that "interesting" look which women are said to admire, and which men regard with savage scorn. Fanshawe was not handsome himself; his eyes were of no particular colour, and he was more muscular than interesting. Therefore his scorn was intensified. Instinctive dislike and enmity

filled his mind, when he saw young Hepburn's head bent so low over Marjory's hand.

"I thought I might come to ask," said Hepburn, hurriedly. "I did not hope to see you. I came in only because Fleming insisted, without any wish to thrust myself—Miss Heriot, you will be good and kind, as you always are. You got my note?"

She did not sit down, but received her visitor standing, which was a kind of satisfaction to the looker-on.

"Yes. I got your note. It is very kind, very friendly of you—"

"Oh, hush! don't say so. Kind of me! But if you will make use of me—anyhow, Miss Heriot! only that I may feel I am doing something. Let me run errands, write letters—anything. What is the use of my life but for your service?" said the young man, in his emotion and excitement.

Fanshawe, fortunately, did not hear these last words.

"Thanks," said Marjory, with a cold yet gentle graciousness. The word sounded to the one as if it had come out of the snows of the Arctic region; but to the other, the distant spectator, it sounded warm and sweet. "We do not require any help, Mr. Hepburn. All that we wished has been done. Everybody has been very kind. How can I thank you? We have felt the kindness of our friends to the bottom of our hearts."

"How can you speak of kindness? There are some who would give anything in the world to take a single burden from you. You will think of me,

then—as the greatest favour, Miss Heriot—if there is anything—anything you think me worthy to do? That is all. I will not say another word except that my whole heart is with you in your grief. I can think of nothing else."

"Nay," said Marjory, drawing back a step like a queen, as she gave him her hand again. "You are too kind to say so."

"Confound these old friends!" Fanshawe said to himself, thinking this double hand-shaking a quite undue and unnecessary familiarity, while poor young Hepburn withdrew, feeling as if she had spoken to him from the top of a mountain—from some chill and impassable distance. "My own fault for intruding so soon," he said to himself, sadly, as he went away.

Thus the brief interview made a totally different impression upon two persons present. Hepburn had not noticed Fanshawe, had scarcely seen, indeed, that there was any one in the room but Marjory herself.

"Is that Johnnie Hepburn?" said Uncle Charles, as he went away. "What a nice-looking young fellow the boy has grown."

"He looks like a Johnnie," said Fanshawe, with a laugh.

It was unpardonably impertinent, he felt, the next moment; but his feelings demanded some relief.

"He is very good and very kind," said Marjory, majestically, casting a look upon him which avenged poor Johnnie. Fanshawe grew meek as a child in

a moment, and begged pardon as humbly as Milly herself could have done.

"And now we can go to the old house," he said, going after her with intense satisfaction, as she went to the door.

"Not now; I am too tired. I cannot do more to-day," said Marjory; and he heard the sound of a low sob as she escaped, little Milly rushing after her.

"It is all that fellow's fault," was Fanshawe's comment, as he went back to his bow-window, and sat down and looked out disconsolately upon the leaden sea and the white choking mist. What was it to him whose fault it was? But Marjory Heriot was the only thing he had to interest him, and he took a great interest in all that affected her—for the moment at least.

CHAPTER XI.

MARJORY, I am sorry to say, thought nothing at all of the interest she had excited; she was not so much as conscious of it; and she did not even think of Fanshawe, who was rather an embarrassment than a comfort to the household. She had been sinking into a certain calm, close as she still was to the great misfortune which had befallen her family; but time travels very quickly at such moments, and it already seemed ages to her since she entered poor Tom's sick-chamber, and since she saw him die. She had been quieted by the calm of the silent Sunday after the funeral; but her visitors had driven all her quiet away. When the Minister had bidden her to be resigned, she had felt a wild impatience fill her mind; she hastened to her own room, dismissing Milly, and then threw herself upon her sofa, and wept as a child weeps. It was sorrow, but it was not such sorrow as Marjory was capable of feeling. Her brother had been dear to her; but he was not all in all to her. Impatience, a painful sense of the narrowness of human sympathy, and the imperfection of human good sense, mingled, in this little outburst, with natural grief, and that painful pity with which, wherever no deep religious sense of gain comes in,

the death of a young man cut off in his prime must be regarded.

Marjory's mind was not one of those which are apt to speculate upon the possibilities of damnation; but on the other hand, it was impossible to think of poor Tom as an evangelical conqueror, a saint-like personage in robes of white and crown of glory. He could not have reached that height, poor fellow! and therefore the ache of pity with which his sister thought of his early severance from all he had cared for, was very sore and painful. The human comparison seemed to add an edge of sharper pain to grief. His companions lived and flourished—and he was gone. They had their easy mornings, their gay evenings, their sports and amusements, and enjoyed them all with light hearts. In the papers that very day, had been an announcement of the marriage of one of them—and Tom was dead!

Marjory's heart contracted with a pang of pain, as though some gigantic hand had crushed it. She thought it was grief, but it was something more than simple grief. Under the sway of this feeling she went to the table upon which his desk had been placed, and seated herself once more before it. The last time she had done so—that time when she had ineffectually questioned Fanshawe—she had felt herself shrink from the painful task, and had not really made any investigation into poor Tom's secrets. Now she opened the desk with her eyes full of tears for him, with that painful contraction at her heart.

There is nothing in the world so sad as thus to open some human creature's most cherished repositories, when the poor soul is gone, and can guard his foolishness no more. How trivial half the things are! a fourth part of them, at least, thrown there in that light-hearted inadvertence which death makes to appear like a solemn intention, puzzling the survivors with its want of meaning. Why did he keep this or that? an unimportant invitation, a letter about nothing at all, an empty envelope, a memorandum about a race, a receipt for physic for a horse. What a curious mixture of awe and astonishment was in her as she gathered them together! They were good for nothing but the waste-basket; and yet the fact that Tom had treasured them gave the worthless scraps an interest. She cleared away a mass of these remains of his life. There is a little hill near Rome which is made, they say, of fragments of crockery, and such other valueless relics of an ended existence; but ah me! when one remembers what sacred spot lies there under the cypress, in the shadow of Testaccio, how solemn and sacred does that mound of classic rubbish become to us! Something of the same effect was wrought upon Marjory by the sight of poor Tom's rubbish, now that death had made it mysterious. She tried hard to get some meaning out of it, and failing in that, put it aside in a pile, with a certainty that it must be her perceptions which were in fault. Was there nothing to be found but these miserable débris, that had so little signification? There were bills besides, and letters

about bills; letters which Marjory knew would be very little welcome to her father. How was she to tell him of them? Tom, poor fellow, had become as a god, as an angel to his father, since his life ended; and to plunge him back again into the old atmosphere of debt and promises to pay—how miserable it would be! She made these too up into a parcel by themselves with a sense of humiliation. Was this all that was left of Tom? His bills; and those frivolous scraps that meant nothing—that had no human value, that threw no light upon his existence. Was it worth while for a man to have been born, to have lived and died, for nothing better than that? Marjory felt that even ill-doing would have been better than no doing at all; and grew scornful almost of her own fears. She had felt as if she were about to thrust herself into Tom's secrets—and lo! Tom had no secrets at all.

These thoughts were in her mind, filling her with a kind of angry shame, when she picked up, out of a corner, a letter, badly folded and badly written; but put away, it was evident, with some care. It had no envelope or address. The paper was very finely glazed and gilt-edged; but it was folded awry, and the handwriting was quite unformed. "No doubt a letter from his groom," Marjory said to herself, with a painful sense of the unsatisfactory character of Tom's correspondences; but when she had read the first few lines, her countenance changed. She paused—she looked at the signature. A momentary look of haughty displeasure and disgust crossed her face, and she let

the letter drop, as if with the intention of tossing it from her; but on second thoughts she changed her mind. She lifted it once more gingerly, as if it were something which might stain the white fingers in which she held it, and with a deep and painful blush began again to read. I do not think there was anything in the letter to call that blush to Marjory's cheek; but she had the same prejudices as other women, and was deeply susceptible to everything that felt like shame. The writing was not absolutely coarse—it was like the writing of a child, unformed and uncertain, written upon ruled lines, which had been partially rubbed out; but the sentiments were not those of a child. This was what, with a proud sense of humiliation, keen disgust and indignation, Marjory read—all her natural prejudices starting into warmest life.

"I cannot write to you in the way you tell me —I would think shame. Oh, Sir, you must not expect much from a poor lass that never has learned anything, till I tried to do it, to please you. There is nothing I would not do to please you. Ye've been very kind to me, Mr. Heriot, like a good man. And, eh! I hope I'll make a good wife, if I could but learn quicker, no to be a shame to you. Sorry, sorry I am that I did not take more advantage of the schule as I might have done—for, oh! Mr. Heriot, them that say 'your face is your fortune,' say little that is pleasant to hear. When I think whiles that it's but for my face ye fancied me; and that, maybe, if any accident happened—if I lost my

colour, or my teeth, or what not, ye would think of me nae mair! Oh, Sir, dinna be like that! If *you* were blind and cripplit, and pock-markit, like old John in the clachan, I would but think the more of you. And you that are a gentleman, Mr. Heriot, and know everything, you should not be less than poor me; for although I am little to set store by, and no a scholar, nor instructed, I'm better than my face, which is just a bit of painted flesh, as the Minister says. If I thought you cared for me, and no just *it*—oh, but I would be happy! I have a great deal to say, but I cannot tell how to say it. I am feared for making you think me more ignorant than ever. My heart's full, full; but I think shame to say all that's in it; you know, Sir, better than I can tell you. When will you come back? oh! when will ye come back? I'm weary of wishing and wishing. My sister Agnes will not go to her place, thinking ye might not like it. John Ogilvy, my first cousin, the son of Uncle John, that is the smith, is away to the College to learn to be a Minister. I do not mind anything else you would like to hear; but that I'm wearying, wearying sore, and aye, the longer the time is, the mair wearying to see my" (here there were a great many erasures —one word written over another till it was impossible to make out what they had been—until it finished in the clearly written words) "my Mr. Heriot again.

"Your ain and your very ain, oh dear, dear Sir,

"ISABELL."

Marjory read this innocent and natural letter with a buzzing of excited pulses in her ears, and a blaze of hot colour in her face. The mere fact that it was a letter from a woman moved her (naturally) as no other kind of secret could have done. Indeed what other kind of secret would have been worth considering in comparison? She drew a long breath when she had read it. Her face was scarlet, as if the shame (if shame there was) had been her own. And it was hardly possible for her, at least for the first moment, to realise that there might be no shame in it. To have felt so, would have been such a triumph over prejudice and over natural feeling as Marjory was not equal to. The bad writing, the bad spelling, the peasant dialect, struck her more strongly than the sentiments did. They seemed to imply vice—vice which to a young and pure-minded woman is the same as crime—nay, is the worst kind of crime. There was then, after all, a mystery in Tom's life, and here it was; a vulgar degrading mystery—the kind of horror which people say is so common in the lives of young men, a suggestion which Marjory loathed as every woman ought to loath it. It filled her with disgust of Tom and of all men.

She threw the paper out of her hand with a cry of indignant wrath, and then slowly, reluctantly, took it up again, unable to resist the fascination. The second time a different impression was made upon her mind. "I'll make a good wife"—what did that mean? Marjory pondered over it with excitement, which was not calmed down by this

new discovery. Had he really meant — was it possible he could have intended to make the writer of this letter his wife? His sister thrilled all over with an indignant movement of horror, Yes, I do not know how to excuse it—but Marjory, who had been blazing hot with shame at the idea of a disreputable connection on her brother's part, felt a shiver of horror go over her at the thought that there might be no shame in it, that his mind might be honourable and his love pure, that he might have intended this woman, this peasant, this Isabell, to be her sister and his wife. Her eyes fixed on those words with a painful stare. "Good heavens, his wife!" and under her breath, in her throat, Marjory murmured, "Thank God!" Thank God for what? that Tom was dead? that he had not lived to carry that intention out? was this what she meant? She stopped short in absolute dismay, when her reason perceived to what length instinct and impulse had carried her.

She hid her burning face in her hands. She fell a-weeping; tears more poignant and real than any she had yet shed for Tom. Her mind turned against itself, lost in that misery of moral confusion which makes the problem of life so doubly bitter. She dared not say to herself that the least honourable explanation was the least terrible; but her thoughts went on in spite of her, against her will, shaping before her a picture of what might have been. This peasant woman in Pitcomlie, mistress of everything, the successor of all the Heriot ladies, filling her own mother's place, Marjory's sister,

Milly's guardian placed on the same level with them, almost superior to them—good heavens! She disowned the thoughts that thus struggled in her. She tried to drive them from her mind, to ignore them, to introduce other feelings in their place, and cried, and hid her face and could not. God had stepped in and preserved the house from this degradation; He had saved them perhaps at the last moment. And things being as they were, and poor Tom doomed anyhow, God be thanked, might not she say it? deep down where nobody could hear, in the depths of her heart.

Marjory was breathless after this battle with her thoughts; she dragged herself out of it she scarcely knew how, frightened to think what she had been thinking, scared as a man is who has travelled in the dark, when morning shows him the precipices he has passed—or like a drowning man who has been struggling with the angry waves, she crept forth upon dry land, and lay there exhausted, trying not to think, hearing the great sea-rollers break beneath, too low to harm her. It seemed to her that she had passed through a terrible conflict, and it made her heart sick to think that this perhaps was the secret which Tom had intended to tell her. Perhaps he had meant to commend the girl to her care, to claim her affection and sympathy; and for the moment she felt fiercely glad that he had not done so, that she was bound by no sort of visible or invisible tie to this unknown Isabell. Yes, she was glad he had not lived to tell that secret, glad he had been stopped from dis-

gracing the family. It hardly seemed to her, for the moment, that the exemption of the house from so great a shame and injury by Tom's death, was too great a thing to have been done by Providence for the sake of the Heriots. She seemed no longer sorry, no longer a mourner, but glad and comforted to think that God had stepped in and stopped it, perhaps, at the last moment when there was no time to lose.

But it was with an agitated heart, and a countenance out of which she could not altogether banish her excitement, that she went down stairs, when old Fleming rang that inevitable bell for dinner. Dinner! with what weary disgust Marjory thought of it, and of the compulsory meeting with all the party, the solemn sitting down to table, the politenesses to Mr. Fanshawe, the efforts she would have to make to interpose herself between her father's irritable grief and her uncle Charles's amiable but sometimes untimely wisdom. She changed one black gown for another rapidly, and smoothed her brown hair, which (strangely she felt) kept its bright colour notwithstanding her mourning. What a farce, she thought to herself, (being bitter and sore) that mourning was? It had just as many troublesome accessories as the gayest dress, nay, almost more; for the most heart-broken of women in the deepest of affliction has got to take care of her crape, that dear and odious addition to all mourning garments. From this it is not to be supposed that Marjory was impatient of her crape. She would not have cheated poor Tom out of a

single fold, she would have enveloped herself in it from head to foot rather than fail in any prejudice of respect. But her heart was sore and her mind excited. Nothing seemed to her to be true. Tom had deceived her, leading her to suppose that some matter worthy of her ears was to be revealed to her; and lo! it was but this vulgar, poor, conventional, common sort of secret; and even she herself was a deceiver, for did she not pretend to mourn for Tom even now, when she had begun to feel that perhaps his death was expedient? All in the house gave themselves out to be mourning for poor Tom; yet Uncle Charles had recovered his interest in everything that was going on, and little Milly in the afternoon had laughed — Mr. Fanshawe, who was Tom's friend, and ought to have been more faithful to the poor fellow's memory, having inveigled the child into it. Thus the party would meet, she said to herself, all longing to escape from this gloom, and talk and think like others, but dared not for Falsehood's sake; and she herself, the falsest of all, even saw good in the calamity, and gave thanks for it. What treachery, what untruthfulness was in all this! The only one who was utterly true in his grief, was the one who would have most chiefly suffered by Tom's further life if he had carried his fancy out — the heart-broken father to whom Marjory, to-morrow, no later, would have to carry Tom's bills, the bills about which, alas! poor Tom had not told the truth. What a confused tangle of falsehood, and pain, and unreality it was!

And Mr. Fanshawe spent a most dreary evening. Marjory had receded, he thought, from all her incipient civilities. She paid scarcely any attention to him, and evaded his skilful reference to the old house, and the visit to it which was to be made to-morrow. If to-morrow was not better than to-day, he felt that he must be driven from Pitcomlie. He could not bear it any longer; and yet there were certain fascinations which held him against his will, even in the midst of this monotony of woe.

CHAPTER XII.

When Marjory went upstairs for the night, she made a strenuous endeavour to get Tom's papers in order for her father, and to ignore the one paper which had opened a door, as it were, in her brother's life, and of which nobody knew but herself. She went on working till long past midnight, always with a consciousness of that letter in the corner, which was like the presence of some one in the room with her, of which she was not supposed to be aware. She tried to forget it, but she could not forget. While she collected the bills and tied them together, her mind went on with a perpetual stream of questions—Who was this girl? Where had Tom met her? Had she really hoped to be Mrs. Heriot of Pitcomlie? and a hundred other mental inquiries to which, of course, there could come no answer. In her mind, she went over all the countryside, searching into every cottage in order to find out, if possible, who "Isabell" was. It is a common name enough in Fife—a score of Isabells presented themselves to her fancy, but she could not realize any one of them as the writer of that letter. And Tom had spent but little time at home. If it had not been so Scotch even, Marjory's curiosity would have been less excited; but it seemed certain that she must know who it was who wrote in that familiar

dialect. While her eye noted the dates of those very different documents which she was collecting —while she made out her list of them, and slowly added up the figures—though that was a mental process somewhat difficult, and not very rapid—her whole soul was absorbed in this other current of thought. She was even capable of feeling grieved and miserable about the effect the bills would have upon her father, while in imagination she was passing from door to door, from cottage to cottage, searching for this Isabell. Was she wondering, perhaps, what had become of her lover, poor foolish thing! perhaps after all, Marjory allowed, with difficulty, she might be truly fond of him, might love him even, after her fashion—might be suffering such tortures as she was capable of, wondering at his silence, wearying—was not that the word in the letter? wearying, wearying! for him who was to come no more. Was Tom's sister, even for a moment, half sorry for the girl? If she was, Marjory scorned the sentiment as a weakness of nature. Then, in its musing, her mind returned to its first view of the matter. Was it certain, after all, that Tom had so far forgotten himself and his family as to woo Isabell for his wife, as the letter implied? might not this be a mere pretence. It seemed to Marjory that her brother was more likely to have sinned vulgarly by that system of false promises which women suppose men to make so lightly, than that he should have seriously intended to introduce such a mistress to the old house. Which would be worst? There could not be a purer-minded woman

than she who pondered, with an aching heart and burning cheeks, this odious question. Was it possible there could be a question on the matter? Marjory hated herself for hesitating—yet there was something to be said on both sides;—that he should have meant well and honourably would be better for Tom—but for the race, the house—

The ingenuous reader will be disgusted with Marjory, as Marjory was with herself; but notwithstanding, the fact remains which we are obliged to record. She got rid of the dilemma with an impatient sigh, disowning it, refusing to answer her own question; and plunged into her additions, which were not much less painful. Oh! to carry that woeful list to Tom's father! to be obliged to set in order the record of poor Tom's prevarications (what a hard word *lies* is—yet sometimes the right one) and extravagances, and the unhappy meanness which must always mingle with extravagance—how it made her heart ache! She sat through half the night preparing that miserable list, and thinking of the other matter which was equally miserable in whatever light it was contemplated. It was two o'clock in the morning, when with her head and her heart alike throbbing with pain, she rose and went to her window and looked out upon the night. It was very dark; she could hear the monotonous rising and falling of the sea, sometimes like a long drawn sob, sometimes sharp like a cry, as it beat and splashed upon the rocks. "The moaning of the homeless sea." How many people listening to it all over the world put their own weariness, and

sadness, and discouragement into that great and ceaseless voice! Between the black sky and the black water, both cheerless and dismal, Marjory felt as if she stood alone, with no one to help her. The world was asleep—all human sympathy was closed up in unconsciousness. Was that other poor soul, that foolish creature, that Isabell, waking somewhere too, and wondering, wearying in her ignorance? Just then a revolving light, far off, sent a sudden steady, yet momentary, flash across the dark water. It was as well known to her as her own name—yet somehow at that moment it was unexpected, and flashed across the waves to her like a word of consolation. At the same moment, Marjory saw what she had not seen before, a figure standing out upon the cliff, turned with its back to the sea as if gazing up at the house. It seemed to her, for the moment, like a ghostly visitor, and gave her a little thrill of terror. Then she turned away with a nervous laugh. The red sparkle of the cigar, and something in the outline of the figure, revealed Fanshawe to her. She dropped her blind, and went in with a little comfort—a sense of society and security; probably had it been the old gardener, she would have felt that sensation of comfort just as warmly. But no; had it been the gardener, Marjory would have wanted, in the first place, to know what he did there; with Mr. Fanshawe, she asked no questions. It was as if some one had held out a friendly hand to her through the chilliness and dullness that wrapped the world.

It may seem to many people very strange that

Marjory should have had so disagreeable a task to do, and not her father, or uncle, or even their solicitor. I cannot explain it further than by saying that this was the custom among the Hay-Heriots. It is so in some houses; the women of some families, as I believe I have already said, are always thrust forward to receive any domestic blow, and transmit it, blunted by its first penetration into the softness of their bosoms. Marjory saw nothing remarkable in this, nor did she even complain of it. Had her mother been living, they would both have received the thrust and taken the edge off, before it reached the father; but as it was, the eldest daughter of the house, heiress of its traditions if of little else, took up her inheritance without shrinking. Had it been out-of-door business, the solicitor would have been employed no doubt; but so far as domestic troubles went the wives and daughters at Pitcomlie were the attorneys of the head of the house and bore the brunt first, preparing the burden for him that he might put it on in the easiest way.

"Have you sorted the papers?" Mr. Heriot asked in his harsh voice next morning at breakfast. He never looked at any one now till he had been irritated into attention. His voice had altogether changed. There was a line of redness and heat under his eyes, leaving the rest of his face pallid though still brown—and this redness seemed to be reflected in the eyes themselves, which were bloodshot and heavy. The droop of his head, the inward look he had, the air of absorption, the passionate inclination to find fault when he spoke at

all, altered his aspect so entirely that his friends of six months ago would scarcely have known the man. He never looked even at his daughters. He spoke to Marjory with his eyes fixed upon his coffee, which he swallowed in great gulps. Mr. Charles had insisted upon talking to him of the visits they had received the day before, which perhaps had something to do with the suppressed passion which showed itself in his tone.

"Not quite," said Marjory, faltering, "nearly, papa—perhaps to-morrow—"

"To-morrow!" he said, "who can say anything about to-morrow? are you or I so sure of seeing it that we should put off our duty? You are a silly thing like the rest. What is to hinder you to give a day to your work like the most part of your fellow-creatures? They go out to their day's darg, be it storm or fine, with a sore heart or a light one. But the like of you must be kept from every fashious thing."

"I submit it to you, Thomas, whether that's quite fair upon Marjory," said Mr. Charles, "we're all in sore trouble—sore trouble, and you worst of all, poor man! but as the Minister says—"

"Confound the Minister!" said Mr. Heriot, "am I to be insulted in my own house by an auld fool, with his cut and dry phrases? I know my duty as well as he does. Marjory, go to your work, and see you do it, and let me have the papers, not later than to-night."

"I shall be ready," said Marjory softly, as her father left the table. She was ready then, to tell

the truth; it was but her reluctance to give him another blow that held her back. She was sorry for him to the bottom of her heart; had she been rich enough to satisfy those claims without carrying them to him, her path would have been easy enough. But she was poor—the eldest daughter, the trusted of everybody, was the only person in the house who had nothing. Her mother had been poor, so that Marjory had no fortune by that side; and Mr. Heriot's sons had been expensive and cost him a great deal of money. Marjory would have something when he died, but so long as he lived she had her small allowance, and nothing more. Little Milly was in a much better position; she would have an independent fortune before she had nearly attained Marjory's age. But Marjory in her mature womanhood, twenty-five, had nothing but fifty pounds a year for her dress; sometimes she felt it was hard, and this was one of these times. It was by way of escaping from herself that she turned to Fanshawe, who was a very close though silent observer of all that went on. She raised her eyes to him, and addressed him frankly with a look of confidence and friendliness which she had never shown to him before.

"You were very late last night," she said, "I saw you upon the cliff."

"Then that was your window," he said, surprised into an admission, "I thought so—I had been walking up and down watching it. It looked like the protecting—light of the house."

He had been on the eve of saying "angel," but stopped in time.

"Not much of a protection," said Marjory, still frank as she had never been before, "it was you who gave me that feeling. I had been working late and I was tired, and the very sight of you was friendly—you and the lighthouse together. You both shone out at the same time; though by the way, now I think of it, it was much too late for you to be out."

"How did you know it was Mr. Fanshawe?" said Mr. Charles, "in the dark *tous les chats sont gris;* and it was very dark last night."

"I knew him by his cigar," said Marjory with a little laugh; not that she had any inclination to laugh, but that she had turned her back with a wild resolution upon the subjects that occupied her, determined at least for the moment to get rid of them. "It was improper, and he ought not to have been there smoking at two o'clock in the morning; but the sight of some one was a comfort to me."

"That is a strange way of convincing me of impropriety," said Fanshawe, delighted, "of course I shall go on doing it all the days of my life. The scene was very wild, as wild as any I ever saw. How black the Firth was, and the sky, and how the surf boiled upon the rocks! It looked like Norway or Canada, rather than this sober well-to-do Fife."

"That is all climate, nothing but climate," said Mr. Charles, "the thermometer has varied fifteen

degrees since Sunday—fifteen degrees! it is just astonishing. Of course anyone could see with half an eye that Sunday was too fine to last. Are you going to work, Marjory, my dear, as your father said?"

"I am going out first for a breath of air," she answered. She was almost gay in her eagerness to escape from herself, and to stave off the painful moment which was coming. She took Milly's hand and ran round to the drawing-room where the windows opened upon the cliff. She went out into the morning sunshine, which fell full upon her uncovered head; the wind blew her hair about, waking in it gleams of richer colour which the sun found out. Nobody knew that it was a kind of desperation which roused Marjory. Her uncle looked at her puzzled and half disapproving, and shook his head. He thought it was a doubtful example she was setting before the servants, so soon after—and Fleming, who looked on very seriously, was of that opinion too.

As for Fanshawe he followed her with delight. "Now is the time for the old house," he said, as he went after the two pretty figures, the young woman and the child, to the edge of the rocks. The sea was blue and the morning bright, the whole world renovated by the new day; and mourning cannot last for ever any more than night. Fanshawe felt disposed to push old Fleming over the rocks when he came brushing past with evident satisfaction to interrupt this moment of ease, with a trayful of letters. But who is there in this nineteenth century

bold enough to obstruct the passage of the post? He had to stand humbly by, and accept his own share, which Fleming handed to him, he thought with a certain triumph, and which consisted of three bills, a note from a livery-stable keeper informing him that his only horse had met with an accident, and an invitation to join a party who were setting out from Cowes on a yachting expedition that day. He got through this satisfactory and pleasant correspondence at a rapid rate, and then he sauntered to the edge of the cliff to wait till Marjory had satisfied herself with her letters. No doubt this would be a much longer process—no doubt she had a hundred dearest friends, who wrote about a thousand ridiculous nothings, and filled up her time and distracted her attention. She had seated herself on the mossy stone steps of the old sun-dial, which stood on that velvet green, undecorated lawn. She had her back turned to him, so that he could look at her at his ease. He thought what a pretty picture it would make; the grey house behind her, with trees appearing beyond that on the land side, and here nothing but the green, green turf, without any flowers, ending in the brown rock of the cliff which descended sheer down, a dangerous precipice to the sea. Milly's golden hair, all blown about, was the central point in the picture, while Marjory with her head drooped over her letters sat on the steps of the old dial, with the wind lightly fluttering her black ribbons, and the golden lights in her brown hair shining out in the sun.

The next moment she uttered a low cry, throw-

ing up her hands. Fanshawe rushed forward. Mr. Charles had gone away to his rooms; Milly had strayed back into the drawing-room; he and she were alone; he rushed up to her—

"Are you ill? What has happened, Miss Heriot?"

"I do not think I am ill. I do not think I can be dreaming. I am sick with fright," cried Marjory. "Oh, Mr. Fanshawe, for God's sake read that, and tell me what you think!"

He took the letter out of her hand. An Indian letter, on thin paper, written with faint ink. For the moment he could not make out the meaning of her terror. This is what he read:—

"Dear Marjory,

"You will be surprised to learn that we are on our way home, though I am sure I am anything but able to travel, nor the poor baby neither, who is a very wee, feeble thing, and not at all well suited with an Ayah. The reason is, Charlie has had the fever again. He would not let me tell you, but I may now, as he is too ill to know what I am writing. This is the third attack, and the doctor at the station, who is a very odd sort of man, coddling up all the men, and never caring for the ladies, has taken a fright; and, what is worse, has given Charlie a fright—and applied for furlough, without even consulting me, though we cannot afford it, and your father has always so opposed his coming home. You need not think it is my fault, for I am no more fit to travel than to

fly, and probably will die on the way, and never trouble you. And if both of us die, as seems more than likely, I hope you will be kind to the children, or at least to Tommy, for baby, I feel, will go with me, if I go. I am sure if the doctor would but leave poor Charlie quiet he would get better, as he has done before; but he has to be lifted into a litter, and carried all the way to Calcutta; and how I am to be expected to look after everything—him, and the luggage, and the children—is more than I know. What with baby's nurse not agreeing with him, and Charlie's being so ill, and not a soul to give me any assistance, I get no rest night nor day; and when I recollect that it is only six weeks since I was confined, I cannot think how anybody has the heart to ask me to do it. However, the doctor has to be obeyed, though I hate him, and we have got leave, and the agents are to lend us the money (for we never have a penny). You need not write, for we hope to catch the steamer at Calcutta, and should be in England in the end of April. But don't be surprised if Tommy comes alone; for even if Charlie gets a little better, I do not think I can bear the journey, and baby is sure to go along with me. Good-bye; if we reach England alive, I will send you word from Southampton; but I don't expect it, for how we are ever to get through the journey—I as weak as water, and my poor baby only six weeks old, and Charlie in a litter—is more than I can say.

"Your affectionate sister,

"MATILDA.

"P.S.—Be kind to Tommy, if he is the only one that reaches home."

"What do you think?" cried Marjory, raising her face to him.

She had forgotten it was Fanshawe. He was the first human creature at hand—the only one to whom she could turn in her distress.

"It is a silly letter; making the worst of everything. It is not, I am sure it cannot be, so bad as she says."

"She does not make the worst of Charlie's illness," said Marjory. "Oh, my poor Charlie! She says next to nothing about him. It is not *her* I am thinking of. My brother—my poor brother, must be dying! Oh God! and what shall we do?"

"She does not say so," said Fanshawe, kneeling down beside her. "Dear Miss Heriot, don't be too easily alarmed. You are weak with the sorrow you have had already. You think everything must end badly—"

"I know it," she said, with a moan; "I know it! We have had nothing happen to us for so long—so long. And it is all coming together now!"

CHAPTER XIII.

The letter of Mrs. Charles aroused a great consternation in the house of Pitcomlie; they did not venture to tell Mr. Heriot of it. Fanshawe went and called Mr. Charles out of his room in the tower, and they all gathered in the bow-window in the drawing-room, and read it sentence by sentence, and talked it over. Marjory was the only one who took no comfort by this meeting. Mr. Charles was very much cast down for the first moment, but it did not last. "She's a very silly woman, a very silly woman," he said over and over. "I'm not meaning to vex you, May; but nothing except a woman could be so silly and so heartless; she is thinking only of herself. However, on the other hand, if Charlie had been so bad as you think, she would have been frightened. There's something in a book I once read about having that fever thrice; the third time is the—God bless me! I cannot remember what my book said."

The fact was, Mr. Charles remembered only too well, and was appalled; he was struck dumb for the moment in his voluble consolations. When he spoke again, he was a great deal less assured in his tone. "Depend upon it," he said, "she is making the worst of everything. I suppose it is her way. She's evidently a silly woman, a very silly woman,

and I would say a very selfish one. But she would not run on like that about herself and the baby, if Charlie was as ill as you think."

"Charlie might be very ill, and she might not know it," said Marjory, "they might not tell her—they might think it would be too much for her in her circumstances. Her baby not six weeks old, and her husband coming home to—"

"To get better, my dear," said Uncle Charles cheerily. "You may be sure to get better. He is young, and has everything in his favour. The very sea-breezes would stir him up. I do not think I would take any notice, my love, to your father. It would only worry him. It will be time enough when you get word from Southampton; and how that will cheer him! Poor Thomas—poor man! I begin to think now that there's some hope for your father, May."

"But what will there be if Charlie—"

"Toots, nonsense, Charlie! Charlie will come home quite well, you'll see," said Mr. Charles. "But as for you, you're looking like a ghost. I'll go and order the horses, and we'll take Mr. Fanshawe out and show him the country. We are all dying for a breath of air."

"I could not go, I cannot go," said Marjory. "Mr. Fanshawe will forgive me, that I cannot think of anything but one thing. Oh, Uncle Charles! have we done anything to bring such misery on the house?"

"My dear," said Mr. Charles, "the rain and the sun come on the just and on the unjust, as the

Scriptures say. We are not justified in forming any rash judgment on ourselves."

"And we have been happy so long!" said Marjory with tears. It seemed a kind of reason for all the misery that was coming now.

"Happy, humph! I would not say—there is many a thing that looks like happiness when you are in great trouble, that was little to brag of when it was here. But in the meantime, I'm going back to my papers," said Mr. Charles, "Mr. Fanshawe, my man, come you with me, you'll perhaps find something to divert you. She's better left to herself—far better left to herself," he added in an undertone. "Womenfolk are not like us, she'll take a cry and she'll be better. To be sure," said Mr. Charles, as he led the way to his tower, looking back upon his reluctant follower, "there's ill men and good men in all the degrees; but I cannot think of a difference so great among us as between that girl, my niece, May, and the like of the selfish creature that wrote that letter. Not a word, not a thought of poor Charlie, as fine a lad as ever stepped—but all her bit miserable bantling of a baby, and her weary self."

"I suppose, Sir, when a woman has a child she thinks of nothing else," said Fanshawe, "or so at least people say."

"Then the Lord preserve my niece, May, from ever having children!" said Mr. Charles, striding up the steps of his tower with his long legs, and with hot but holy indignation in his tone. Luckily the echoing of the spiral staircase drowned the

laugh with which his companion listened. Fanshawe laughed only from his lips, for to tell the truth the suggestion annoyed him. He seemed immediately to see Marjory with a child in her arms, lavishing fondness upon it, while some idiot of a husband looked complacently on. Sometimes men love to weave such associations about women, sometimes on the contrary they are revolted by the notion; and the latter was Fanshawe's case. He had not gone so far as even to dream of the possibility of marrying Marjory, or anyone else himself—and of course she would marry, some fool, some Johnnie something or other who never could, never would satisfy that woman's mind. She would do it out of mere kindness, to please him, or to please somebody else, some old grandmother or uncle, or ancient bore of one kind or another, and drop into a mere child-producing, baby-worshipping dowdy; she would be compelled to take to babies, the husband being a fool and unworthy of her. Fanshawe listened to Mr. Charles's lecture on the history of the Fife families with languor after this, making now and then an impertinent observation which startled the sage.

He asked "What did it matter?" when his companion enlarged upon that doubtful point in the pedigree of the Morrisons, where it was rumoured, a captain from the whale-fishing had come and married the heiress and injured the blood. "Matter!" said Mr. Charles with true indignation, "it matters just this, Sir, that the auld house of the Morrisons deriving from Sir Adam of that name, that was

drowned in the ship that brought over the Maid of Norway, would be turned into mere nobodies—nobodies, Sir; with a harpoon and a fishing-net for their cognizance—"

"But even a harpoon and a fishing-net, after a century—" Fanshawe began.

"Century, Sir; what's about a century?" said Mr. Charles.

But Fanshawe did not carry on the quarrel. He was too much occupied in considering the original question with which he had started, and how confoundedly Johnnie something or other would crow over the rest of mankind if such a woman was so silly as to marry him—a question embodying, as he felt, more human interest than any difficulty that could arise in regard to the captain of the whaling-ship.

Marjory did not do as her uncle prophesied. This last piece of news had dried up all tears from her eyes. She wandered about the upper part of the house, now pausing in that room where Fanshawe had been once called to her, and which still bore the name of "the boys' room," and now returning to her own. She even took a napkin and dusted carefully poor Charlie's share of the books, and his golfing-clubs, and some small statuettes belonging to him; she put some flowers in a little vase under his portrait, and then withdrew them quickly, and threw them out of her window, some chance thought of resemblance to the decking of a grave having struck her fancy. She was sick and

restless, unable to keep still, longing for news—further news—fearing to allow herself to think.

After some time, when she had made up the packet of Tom's papers for her father, she took the letter which had so much disturbed her yesterday from the desk, and placed it in a little letter-case with the one she had received that day. Why she did this she could not have explained. She went wandering in her listlessness and suspense all over the house, finding here and there some trifle to rectify, which gave her a momentary occupation, and, what was more wonderful, finding at every turn some reminiscence of her brother Charlie, which a few hours ago she would not have noted. He had been out of the house for many years, and never till to-day had she been aware how much there was of him still in the old home, which somehow seemed to Marjory to-day like a mother preserving traces of all her children. An old fishing-rod of his hung in the hall; a bird which he had shot, and which for some boyish fancy had been stuffed and preserved, stood looking at her with its little beady eyes from the corner of the staircase. She had forgotten all about it till to-day.

At last Marjory, in the sickness of her heart, went to the old Tower, to her uncle's room. There she could talk a little at least, which might be a relief. Mr. Fanshawe had long before left that refuge of learning and leisure, and Mr. Charles, who was compiling a family history, sat among his papers with his spectacles on his nose, collecting facts and arranging pedigrees, as calmly as though

there were no present anxieties to disturb his mind, or future to thrill it into terror.

"Well, May, my dear!" he said, cheerily, looking up at her over the top of his spectacles; and then relapsed into his work. It is impossible to estimate the advantage which that work was to Mr. Charles Hay-Heriot. It kept him occupied, it kept him happy, it gave him "a duty" which he was bent on performing and a "responsibility" which he was proud to feel. He would search for days together to prove the accuracy of a date—happy days, during which he felt himself as important as Herodotus. Friends all over the country would stop him when they met, and would write him letters when they were apart, to ask how "his work" was progressing. He had come now to a very important part of that work. He had collected all the materials for his fifth chapter, which began the Reformation period, and he had now begun the work of composition, putting these materials together, which was a very interesting and solemn operation. He had not said anything about this *Opus* to Fanshawe the first time he had invited him to his room; but to-day, in the confidence of increasing friendship, he had told him, and the little flutter of pleasurable importance with which he had taken the stranger into his confidence hung about him still.

"Well, May, my dear," he said, after a long pause, "you have come to see how I am getting on?"

"I am looking at you, Uncle Charles," said Marjory, dreamily. How far off he seemed from

her in that placid, gentle old age, with the occupation that pleased him as its games please a child! Could his blood boil any more, or his heart throb any more as hers was throbbing? She sighed unconsciously as she spoke. It seemed to her that Fanshawe, who was a stranger, yet who was in full tide of life, and knew what it meant to be cast about by varying tumults of feeling, would understand her better than her calm old uncle—"though he was a stranger," Marjory, in her unconsciousness, said to herself.

"Well, my dear, I hope it's no uninstructive," said Mr. Charles, with a gentle laugh. "I do not set up for genius; but so far as work goes—honest work—"

There was a pause again, but that was not an unusual circumstance. Marjory was a frequent visitor in the tower, and sometimes the two, who were fond of each other, would sit together for hours pursuing their own occupations, with a pleasant sense of companionship but without any talk. His niece's presence did not disturb the old man; he went on quite peacefully, taking it for granted that she, too, was occupied in her way. Nor did he lay down his pen, or look up at her face until she broke the silence by the sudden question,

"Now you have had time to consider it, what do you think about Charlie, Uncle Charles?"

"Toots, my dear!" said Uncle Charles. He put down his pen, as we have said, and stretched his hand to her across the table. "You are getting silly—like other women, my bonnie May."

"But what do you *think*, Uncle Charles?"

"I can think no more than I did before, for I have no more information," said Mr. Charles, pushing back his chair, and crossing his long legs; "and thinking will do no good—no good, my dear, if we were to think till we died of it. You just make yourself unhappy indulging anxiety. We must wait till we hear."

"But what do you think of the letter, Uncle Charles?"

"The letter—oh, that's something tangible. It's a very heartless letter, a very silly letter; but you heard beforehand that she was a silly thing. So far as I can see, there is very little in it about Charlie; and as for her weakness and her baby's, that's not so very important. No fear of them; and as for you and me, May, whatever happened to Mrs. Charles, we could get over *that*."

"I wish her no harm," said Marjory hastily.

"Certainly, no harm," said Mr. Charles; "but oh, my dear, what a woman to be mistress of Pitcomlie! what a creature to come after my mother! and your mother, May—though she, poor thing, reigned but a short time in the old house. This one will be a new kind of lady among the Heriots. We've been fortunate in our wives, as I've often told you. I am just giving a description of how Leddy Pitcomlie, under the Regent Mary of Guise, held the old house against the French. She was one of the first converts of the Reformation. We were terrible Whigs in those days; she was a daughter of—"

"Yes," said Marjory vaguely. "That is something new to think of — Matilda in Pitcomlie. Uncle, we never knew — you never heard — that Pitcomlie might have had another kind of mistress?"

Mr. Charles raised himself with eager interest. This was entirely in his way, and moved his curiosity to the utmost.

"Another kind of mistress? There was your stepmother, of course — a nice kind of creature; but she did not live. A wife that does not live is a misfortunate thing in a family; it deranges the records, and takes away the unity; but is it of her you are thinking? What other mistress, May, if it were not yourself?"

"This is what I found in Tom's desk," said Marjory, turning pale and then red with emotion and excitement. She had not meant to show it—and yet it was so hard to keep from showing it—to shut up the secret in her own breast. She drew out her letter-case slowly, and took from it the uneven paper, with its uncouth writing, so unlike Matilda's smooth and ladylike letter. Some accidental sound in the room, some creaking of the furniture, or rustling of the papers which the wind from the open window rustled on the table, almost arrested her, and made her look up with startled awe-stricken eyes, as if some unseen messenger had come to stop her. At length she put it into her uncle's hand. He had followed all her movements with surprise, and now he had to fumble for his spectacles, to put them on, to uncross his legs, and

draw his chair close to the table. All these little preliminaries had to be gone through, for to Mr. Charles a letter was a document; it was valuable material to be put away for after-use. He read a few lines, and then he gave a startled look at Marjory. "My dear," he said, with indignation, folding it up again; "such a thing as this should never have fallen into your hands; it's disgraceful! it's——. My dear, your father goes too far — putting the charge of Tom's things on you. He was not a reprobate, but he was not an example. Forget it, May, forget it; such a thing should never have been shown to you."

"But Uncle Charles! you see what she says—'I'll make a good wife.'"

"Nonsense, nonsense, my dear," said the old man, with a flush on his face; "the sort of thing that lads say to beguile these silly fools. I am not defending men, nor is it a subject to be named between you and me; but if you but knew how these silly idiots court their destruction! not another word more. My dear May, my bonny May! to think that the like of this should have been seen by you!"

"Uncle, it is not a fool's letter; it is not a wicked letter—"

"Whisht, whisht, my bonnie woman! as if the like of you could judge; not another word. I will burn it for poor Tom's sake. He has answered his account with his Maker, and why should we keep evidence against him for those that come after us—"

"Give it me back again," said Marjory, feeling

her property invaded; "I cannot have it burned, uncle. Perhaps this was the something he wanted to tell me; give it me back. Oh," she said, suddenly forced by the opposition to a great effort of nature; "it is very different from this other letter; very different! *She* would not have written of my Charlie as his wife does. Give it me, Uncle; I must keep it. It is Tom's legacy to me."

"May, May! trouble and suspense are turning your head."

"My head is not turned," she said; "give me back my letter, Uncle; I thought you would help me. Whatever she was, wherever she is, she was not like *that*."

Mr. Charles allowed her to draw it out of his hand; he shook his head and reproved her gently.

"My dear, you are excited; you do not know what you are saying. Put it away, put it away, if you will have it; but do not speak of an unhappy girrl in the same breath with Charlie's wife. That must never be; and such a thing should never, never have come into your hands."

Marjory hurried away almost angry, with her letters in her hand. She could ask counsel from no one else; and here she had failed; she rushed back to her room with them, very sad at heart; she, to make herself the champion of the unknown girl, whose very existence had seemed to her no later than yesterday, such a sin and shame!

CHAPTER XIV.

It would be vain to attempt to trace the manner in which this revulsion of feeling came about. Marjory had gone through the whole gamut of emotions in respect to the letter which she had found in Tom's desk. First shame, indignation, and the hardest sentence with which women can damn a woman. Then a wavering of the balance, a protestation of justice against the hasty verdict which might have no foundation. Then a sense of escape and gratitude that no harm had come of it; and last of all, a tremulous feeling of pity, perhaps the first Christian sentiment of the whole, but the only one of which Marjory was ashamed. The thing, however, which all at once had made this pity into sudden sympathy was the letter of Mrs. Charles—a woman about whom there could be no controversy. Charlie's equal—Charlie's most lawful wife, under all the regulations and safeguards that law and religion could give. When she placed the one letter by the other, Marjory's heart swelled with a sudden indignant vindication of the poor unknown girl who had loved her brother. All at once Isabell became a distinct individual, almost a friend. A sudden protest against all her own suspicions arose in her mind; she acquitted the girl of everything as she had accused her of everything. The

process of thought was easy enough—its very suddenness was natural. She went to the quietness of her room in which she had first read Isabell's letter with such a tempest of shame and humiliation, with very different feelings, contrasting Matilda's letter with this other one, and asking herself, with a vehemence of indignation which surprised her, which of them was the least womanly—which the more true and real. Her emotion, however, though she was not aware of it, was not all founded upon this contrast. In point of fact, it afforded a certain outlet to her excitement, and solaced her in the misery of her suspense. She locked up the letters in her jewel case, with a fantastic sense of their importance; she turned the little silver key upon them, as if she had been imprisoning two potent spirits. Some day or other, the prisoners would be liberated, and come forth, each to fight her own battle. Marjory was sane enough still to smile at her own fantastic force of imagination as this thought crossed her mind—to smile at it momentarily, as a kind of tribute to her reason; but without any real sense of ridicule. How her interest had shifted since yesterday, since this morning! Poor Tom's papers lying there, carefully made up, seemed to her a year old at least, something done with and over. But Charlie, Charlie! was he being carried home to them over the sea, breathing in health and restoration from every breeze, coming to his natural place, the only son, the heir, the future head of the house? Or was he?—Marjory clasped her hands tightly together with a low cry of pain.

Of all miseries on earth, I think suspense is the hardest to bear. To think that something may be happening that very moment, while you are far off, and for good or for evil can do nothing. To think that something may have happened—that the dread calm of certainty may have followed the excitement of a terrible event to the others who know; and to be unable to go out to meet the news you long for—to have nothing to do but to wait for it. There is no more common misery in the experience, at least, of women; and there is none more hard to bear.

Marjory passed that dreary, restless afternoon in hourly expectation of a call from her father, but Mr. Heriot did not call her. He took no notice of the subject which he had spoken of so angrily at breakfast, when they met at dinner. When that meal was almost over, old Fleming carried to her, with voluble explanations, another letter.

"Mistress Williamson has sent up to say that by some accident this was putten in to the Carslogie bag," said Fleming. "It's an Indian letter, and it's come back with a man and horse, being markit 'Immediate,' as you'll see, Miss Marjory. Mistress Williamson, poor body, is terrible vexed; and being an Indian letter, and markit 'Immediate'—"

"Thank you; that will do, Fleming," said Marjory, seizing it.

Oh, if she could but have rushed from the table to make herself mistress of this second message! Her heart sank down, down to the very depths.

All hope seemed to die in her; yet she threw her handkerchief over it, and tried to control herself. There had been a pause, as there so often was now at that cheerless table; and Mr. Charles, who was not very quick of hearing, had put his hand to his ear, and asked, "What is it?" which called his brother's attention to the occurrence. Mr. Heriot, who had been very silent, turned to his daughter with the angry tone which he now always employed when he spoke to her.

"Why don't you read your letter? There are no strangers here but Mr. Fanshawe, and he, I suppose, does not stand on ceremony. From India, did that blockhead say?"

"Ay, Sir; that was what the blockhead said," answered Fleming, who was behind his chair. "I'm no minding what you call me. It was a bletterin' scoondrel yesterday, and it may be a good fellow the morn. I hope I know how to do my duty, whatever happens; if you'll but eat some dinner," the old man added, dropping his voice with an inflection which was almost tender.

This little interruption directed Mr. Heriot's thoughts from Marjory's letter. He bade Fleming begone for an old rogue, and emptied the dish he offered. Something had softened the heart-broken father in his passion of grief; or else the high-pressure, the immediate violence of his feelings, was wearing out. It was only after some minutes that, still harsh and sharp in his tone to her, though softened to others, he looked down the table to Marjory, and asked quickly,

"Was your letter from Charlie? Does he say when he's coming? What is it about?"

"It is a letter from Matilda's sister," said Marjory, in a voice tremulous with suppressed feeling. "We do not know her, papa—a Miss Bassett. She tells me she was to join them at Calcutta, to come home with them, and something about hoping to make my acquaintance. That is all."

"That is not much," said Mr. Heriot; "but to know he is on the way is something. If I but see my boy back— Fleming, there's that claret with the yellow seal—"

"Is Charlie—?" began Mr. Charles.

He was going to say was Charlie better. To him, as to all the others, it seemed so long since this morning, when the news of Charlie's illness came, that the arrival of further news did not seem impossible. The same strange feeling of the long duration of these few sorrowful days dulled Mr. Heriot's mind to the recollection that it was a very short time since Charlie had been called home, and that no reply to that call could have come so soon. He accepted Marjory's explanation without any more questions, while Mr. Charles stopped, trembling, in his question, appalled by the look which she had given him. Mr. Heriot took no notice; a little gleam of happier feeling seemed to wake in him. He entered into a little dispute with Fleming, as to how much was left of the yellow seal. And when Marjory left the room soon after, he even stopped her, with some return of gentleness, to give her directions about Charlie's rooms.

"If you are thinking what rooms to give them, May," he said, hastily, "put them in the west wing. It will be warmest for the bairns."

It was the first time he had called her by her name since the funeral. Poor Marjory hurried away, choking, afraid to trust herself to speak, assenting only with a movement of her head.

"Oh, papa's better! don't you think he's better? He kissed me, May," cried little Milly, as they went hand in hand along the passage which led to the drawing-room.

Marjory made no answer. She wanted to be alone. She wanted to think it all over. She placed herself in the corner of a sofa which commanded the great bow-window, and from which she could see so much of the pale grey blue sky and wistful half-twilight atmosphere. A nervous thrill was upon her. She had heard nothing; and yet was not this letter confirmation of her worst fears?

The lamp burnt steadily and clear upon the table; the firelight flickered from the fireplace. A comfortable interior, warm, and safe, and calm, full of homely luxury, but so strangely connected with the outside world by that uncovered window, and the pale sky that looked in. It was symbolical, Marjory thought. What might be going on beneath that chilly heaven, beneath the great pale vault which roofed the sea, where, dead or living, Charlie was? Her heart ached with the burden of that suspense. How hard it was to bear it, and say nothing—and to let her father take fallacious comfort, only to be the more deeply overthrown!

She had been only a few minutes here when some one followed hastily from the dining-room. She thought it was her uncle, and turned to him, holding out her hand. But the hand was taken with a warmth of sympathy, which Uncle Charles would scarcely have shown.

"Pardon me," said Fanshawe; "I was so anxious. I came to ask what your news really is. You don't think me impertinent? I wanted so much to know."

This sudden touch of sympathy moved Marjory, as the unexpected always does. It was so much warmer, and more ready than Uncle Charles' slow effort to follow her quicker feelings; his search for spectacles, both physical and mental; his reproofs of needless anxiety. She was overcome for the moment, and gave way to sudden tears, which relieved her. "Thanks," she said, with a half sob; "there is nothing in it; at least I think there is nothing in it; read it and tell me what you think."

He had to go to the lamp, which was on the centre table, where Milly, confused and wondering to find herself without any share in her sister's thoughts, had seated herself in forlorn virtue "to read her book." Many a look Milly threw at Marjory upon the distant sofa in the dark, looking at that window where the shutters were not shut, nor the curtains drawn, and which frightened the child with eerie suggestions of some one who might be looking in upon her. She looked up at Mr. Fanshawe, too, as he stood over her, unconscious of her existence, reading that letter. What was it

about? and why should he know about it, while Milly did not know? She read a sentence in her book between each of these glances, and was divided in her mind between the intent of this present drama, which she did not understand, and that of the story of the poor little boy, who died because he was good. The story itself made the child's heart ache, and the other strange mystery confused her. Fanshawe read the letter anxiously, as if he had something to do with it; he thought he had for the moment. Marjory's confidence in him, her appeal to him that morning, the subtle effect of feeling himself a member, even temporarily, of this household, and becoming penetrated with its atmosphere, all wrought in him. He had no intention of appearing more interested than he was; he was quite honest in the warmth and depth of his sympathetic feelings. And this was a letter of a very different character from the other; it was very short, and quite unemotional.

"Dear Miss Heriot,

"I hear from my sister that she is going home with her husband and the children; and I hear from others that he is very ill. I have made up my mind, with my father's consent, to go with Matty, who, I need not tell you, is very unfit for any such responsibility. I have heard of you from poor Charles, and I think you may perhaps be glad to know that there is some one of some sense with them, whatever happens. I hope you will kindly allow me to go to you for a few days, to see them safely settled;

but anyhow, I shall be with them, to take care of them to the best of my power.

"Believe me, dear Miss Heriot,

"Sincerely yours,

"INVERNA BASSET."

"What a strange name, and what a strange little letter!" said Fanshawe, drawing a chair in front of Marjory's sofa, and seating himself there; "but there is nothing in this, Miss Heriot, to alarm you—more—"

Marjory had felt her heart lighten—until he came to that last word, which he said with hesitation, after a pause. For the moment it had appeared to her that the stranger's eye, cooler than her own, had seen something re-assuring in the letter; but all the more for this momentary relief did her heart sink. "More!" she echoed, with a forlorn voice. "I could not be more alarmed than I am. I am almost more than alarmed. I am—."

"Hush," he said softly, putting out his hand to touch hers, with a momentary soothing, caressing touch. "Hush! don't say anything to make your terrors worse. You are very anxious; and it is natural. But think, he is young; he will have two anxious nurses. He will have quiet and the sea-air, and the knowledge that he is coming home. After all, everything is in his favour. I do not ask you not to be anxious; but try to think of the good as well as the evil."

"The evil is so much more likely than the good," said Marjory. "He is weakened with fever;

one of his nurses will be taken up with herself and her baby; the other is almost a stranger to him. Then the sea-air will be neutralized by the close cabin, the wearisome confinement; and he does not even know that his father will be glad to see him. Had he come home sick a month ago, only a month ago, he would not have been very welcome, perhaps. All this has to be considered, and poor Charlie knows it. Mr. Fanshawe, I do not mean to blame my poor father—"

"I know," said Fanshawe, still with the same soothing tone and gesture. "You must not think me so dull and stupid. I am not much of a fellow —I am not worthy of your confidence; but at least I am capable of understanding. I see all that is passing—"

Marjory was half touched, half repelled; touched by his humility and by his sympathy; but so sensitive was her condition, almost turned from him by that position of spectator, that very faculty of seeing everything, of which he made a plea for her favour. She drew back from him slightly, without explaining to herself why.

"Yes," she said; "but you must remember that a stranger sees more, sometimes, than there is to see; and less, less a great deal than he thinks. My father has always been a most kind father to all of us. At this present moment our loss has absorbed him in one thought; but he has always considered all our interests, and a month ago Charlie's return would have meant a great loss to Charlie, which my father, with his sense of justice to the rest of

us, would not have felt himself justified in making up."

Marjory gave forth this piece of special pleading with a calm air of abstract justice, which moved Fanshawe at once to a smile and a tear. He dared not for his life have shown his inclination to the first; and, indeed, he was sufficiently *attendri* by his position to make the other more natural.

"I know, I know," he said, hastily; and then added, "Nevertheless, I think you may put some confidence in the writer of this letter. Who is she —do you know her? It seems as if she would not talk, but do."

"Charlie speaks of her as the strong-minded sister," said Marjory. "He has mentioned her two or three times. Their father is a Civil servant in Calcutta, and she keeps his house. They have no mother. She takes care of everything, I have always heard. Charlie laughs at her, but I think he likes her. She does everything. Perhaps that is why the other sister is so helpless—I mean; Mr. Fanshawe, you hear everything as if you were one of the family. I have never seen Charlie's wife; most likely my idea of her is wrong. You will forget it; you will not think of it again."

"I hope I shall be worthy of your confidence," said Fanshawe. "I think I almost am. It seems to me that I must be another man since I knew you. I have never thought much of anything; but now if thinking would do any good—"

"I don't believe it does," said Marjory, with a smile. It was very faint and momentary, but yet it

was a smile. "The less one thinks and the more one can do, that is the best."

"But you do not approve of simple want of thought," he said, cunningly drawing her into those superficial metaphysics which take such a large place in serious flirtations. He was not consciously thinking of flirtation, but he thought he had a right to take advantage of his opportunities. Marjory, however, divined without perceiving, the trap.

"Had my father left the dining-room, Mr. Fanshawe? He looked better to-night. I see you are surprised at old Fleming's freedom, and how he talks. He is an old servant; he has seen us all come into the world. We could not speak to him as to an ordinary servant. Ah! here is Uncle Charles at last!"

This exclamation was not agreeable to her present companion. He repeated the "At last!" to himself with a sense of failure which was very irritating. Surely he was as good as Uncle Charles, at least.

CHAPTER XV.

Some days passed on in a noiseless calm of suspense; suspense which dwelt chiefly in Marjory's mind, and did not hang heavily upon anyone else. Mr. Charles, with the placidity of his age and character, settled the question beforehand with sanguine confidence.

"Depend upon it, my dear, we'll have him home all right and well," he said; "quite well. There is nothing like a sea-voyage for fever; it's self-evident. That little woman, that sister-in-law, will take good care of him. What an energetic bit creature it must be! Why do I say bit creature? She may be as tall as you are? No, no, that's impossible. It was a small creature that wrote that letter; a little woman, probably no so young as she once was, but a kind of capable being, that will make him do as she pleases. You may be sure she has a will of her own. She will guide him like a boy at school, which will be the best thing for him. Depend upon it, my dear, she'll bring him to us safe and sound."

Marjory did not depend upon it, but she kept silence, and the slow days crept on. Fanshawe lingered, he could scarcely have told why. No one asked him to stay. He was accepted by all as part of the family, with a quiet composure which is

sometimes more grateful to a man than protestations of cordiality; but that was not his reason for remaining at Pitcomlie. He stayed—because he said to himself he wanted to see it out. It was a chapter of family history into which he had been thrust unwittingly, and he must see what would be the end of it—if the other brother would come back, and poor Tom's place be filled up—or if—

It had the excitement of a drama to him; and Marjory's face, day after day, varying as the weather varied, brightening into hope sometimes under the influence of the sunshine, falling blank and pale into despondency with every cloud, interested him as nothing had ever interested him before. This passion of suspense which possessed her whole soul, purified and elevated her beauty somehow. It made her features finer, the outline of her face more perfect, and gave a hundred pathetic meanings to her eyes. For she was not selfishly absorbed nor dead to other things. Through the veil of that preoccupation which wrapped her about like a mist, nature would struggle forth now and then, coming to the surface, as it were, with smiles and outbreaks of lighter feeling or of independent thought. Anxious as she was, she was too true and natural to be always thinking even of her brother. And Marjory could not be monotonous even in her gloom. She changed from one phase to another, so that the spectator seemed to grow in knowledge of humanity, and wondered to himself how one emotion could put on so many semblances.

And she was relieved on her father's account,

though disturbed on Charlie's. Mr. Heriot had never again asked for Tom's papers. He had relaxed a little in his passionate misery. Sometimes, instead of snarling at his family, he would soften and throw himself upon their sympathy. He would take Milly with him when he went out to walk, holding her hand tenderly, supporting himself by her, as it seemed.

"Papa never speaks to me, May," Milly said, who was half-frightened, half-flattered by being thus chosen for her father's companion. He never says anything but 'My bonnie bairn!' And sometimes, 'May will be kind to her—May will be kind to her.' That is all he ever says."

"You must try and get him to talk, my dear," said Uncle Charles. "Make remarks, if it was only upon the sea and the rocks, or the fishing-boats, and the way they hang about in-shore. If he but said, 'Hoots! hold your tongue, Milly,' it would be something gained."

"Oh, Uncle Charles, what remarks can I make," said Milly, "and me so little? Only when he says May will be kind to me, I greet—I mean I cry; and then he pats me on the head. As if I ever expected any other thing of May!"

"My little darling!" Marjory said, holding her close, "as if there was anybody, but a monster, that would not be kind to you."

Another time it would be Fleming who would be the expositor.

"Mr. Charlie should hurry hame," the old servant

said, shaking his head. "I'm no a man of many words; but, Miss Marjory, he should hurry hame."

"I hope he is coming, Fleming, as fast as winds and waves can bring him."

"Lord! what's the good of that telegraph?" said Fleming. "If a body could travel by't, when they're sair wanted, it would be worth having—instead o' thae blackguard messages that plunge a hail house in trouble without a why or a wherefore. Ay, he should hurry hame."

"Why do you say so?" asked Marjory, more anxious than the others.

"Because—humph!" said Fleming, pausing, and looking round upon them. "Miss Marjory, a' the world's no young like you, and heedless. I have my reasons. You ken nothing about it—nothing about it. Eh, but I hope he'll hurry hame!"

"He thinks my father is growing weaker," said Marjory to Fanshawe, as they continued their walk round that bit of velvet turf which crowned the cliff, "and I think so too."

"Not more than he has been always—that is since I came," said Fanshawe.

"Yes, more. And he has grown so gentle too —so gentle. Think of his saying I would be kind to Milly—making a merit of it! It goes to my heart."

"He was very cross this morning," said Fanshawe, off his guard.

"Cross! I am sorry I trouble you with such subjects," Marjory replied at once, with intense dignity. "Of course family details are always unimportant to strangers. Have you heard of a boat that will do

for yachting? We do so little boating on the Firth, for ornament; it is all for very use."

"You would not have me make myself useful to the world in a fishing coble?" said Fanshawe, ruefully, making a hundred apologies with his looks.

And then Marjory would laugh both at herself and him, and there would gather a dangerous blob of moisture in either eye.

Thus it will be seen this moment of waiting was not a solitary moment. It had come to be habitual with them to take that "turn" two or three times round the lawn, after breakfast, and again in the twilight after dinner, when the evenings were mild. It had been Mr. Heriot's custom always. His "turn" was part of the comfort of his meal. He had given it up, but somehow the others had resumed the habit. Mr. Charles would go once round with Milly before he disappeared to his tower, and then Milly would steal into her favourite corner by the open window, and the other two, sometimes not quite amicably, sometimes indifferently, sometimes with absent talk of all that might be coming, strayed round and round the mossy turf again. Insensibly to herself Marjory had come to look forward to that "turn."

Fanshawe was a stranger; he offended her sometimes, sometimes he was in the way. She said to herself that she would be glad if he were gone, and wondered why he stayed. Yet there were things which he could understand better than Uncle Charles understood them. Whether he provoked her, or felt for her, somehow there was always an understanding beneath all. He was near her own age; he could

enter into her feelings. Marjory did not often go so far as to discuss this question with herself, yet, without knowing it, she would say a great deal to the stranger as they took that turn round the lawn.

It was one morning after breakfast that the end of this long suspense came. They were on the cliff as usual, and as usual Mr. Charles and Milly had gone in. The letters were late that day. How is it that they are always late when they bring important news? Fanshawe by her side recognised Miss Bassett's writing on an English letter the moment that Marjory took it from the tray. He had seen the writing but once before, and he knew it. So did she. She trembled so that the other letters were scattered all about on the turf, where they lay, no one caring for them. Once more Marjory sat down on the mossy step of the sun-dial. She looked up at him pitifully as she tore open the envelope. He, scarcely less excited, leant over her. He was a stranger, and yet he read the letter over her shoulder, as if he had been her brother, feeling in that moment as her brother might have felt.

"I did not telegraph. I thought this would bring you the news soon enough. I am starting to come to you with poor Matty and her fatherless boys."

Marjory turned and raised her eyes to the anxious face leaning over her.

"Is that how you read it?" she asked, making a pitiful appeal. "I—I cannot see. Her fatherless boys. Charlie! Oh, my God! I cannot see any more."

The letter dropped from her hand. She put down her head upon her lap. She did not sob, or

faint, but held herself fast, as it were, crushing herself in her own arms. Poor Marjory! The man by her side dared not put his arm round her to support her, and there was no one else to do so. While he stood by her, with his heart full of pity, not knowing what to say or do, she made a sudden movement, and lifted the letter, thrusting it into his hand.

"Read it to me," she said, "read it—every word."

He sat down beside her upon the steps of the sun-dial. No thought of anything beyond the deepest and tenderest sympathy was in his mind. It was his impulse to draw her close to him, to shelter her as much as his arm could, to make himself her prop and support; and this for love, yet not for love—as her brother might have done it, not her lover. But he dared not make this instinctive demonstration of tender pity and fellow-feeling. He sat by her, and read the letter, while she listened with her head bent down upon her knees, and her face covered with her hands. In the cheerful morning sunshine, within shelter of the old house which was so deeply concerned, he read as follows, his voice sounding solemnly and awe-stricken, like a funeral service, but so low as to be audible only to her ear.

"I did not telegraph; I thought this would reach you soon enough. I am starting to come to you with poor Matty, and her fatherless boys. I wish I knew how to tell you that it might be easier than the plain facts; but I do not know what else to say. Your brother died at sea soon after we left. I had got to be very fond of him. I will tell you all he

said when I come. And I hope you will try to look over Matty's little faults—for he was very fond of her to the last.

"We shall arrive soon after you receive this. I am very, very sorry. I do not know what more to say.

"VERNA."

There was a long pause. She did not move or speak; she had to get over her grief as best she could, at once—to gulp it down, and think of the future, and how to tell her father he had no son. It was a hard effort, and this was the only moment she dared take to herself. As for Fanshawe, he sat beside her very sadly, looking at her, wondering if he ought to say anything—trying to think of something to say. What could he say? not anything about resignation; nor that it was better for Charlie. How did he know whether or not it was better for Charlie? He felt sad himself to the bottom of his heart, as if it was he who had lost a brother. Tears had come to his eyes, which did not feel like tears of sympathy. Then he touched her shoulder, her dress, softly with the ends of his fingers—so lightly that it might have been the dropping of a leaf; it was all he dared to do. Marjory started all at once at this touch—light though it was.

"Yes," she said; "it is true; there is no time to sit and think. I must give orders about their rooms —and—my father must know."

"Miss Heriot, my heart aches for you. Tell me, what can I do?"

"Yes," said Marjory; "I know it; you are as kind as—a brother. Oh me! oh me!—but stop me, please; I must not cry. The first thing is—my father must know. Mr. Fanshawe, will you go and see where he is?—if he is in the library? It is cowardly; but I seem to want a moment first; a moment—all to myself—before I tell him. Will you see if he is there?"

"Let me take you in first. Yes, yes, I will go."

"Never mind me; do not think of me," said Marjory, nervously twining and untwining her hands. "And tell my uncle, please—and Fleming. Tell them; all except papa. God help him! it will kill him. It is I who must tell papa."

She looked so wild and woe-begone that he hesitated a moment; but she waved her hand to him almost with impatience. He looked back before he went into the house, and saw her sitting where he had left her—gazing into the vacant air before her, shedding no tears, twisting her fingers together; half crazed with the weight of trouble, which was more than she could bear.

Fanshawe went softly into the house; he felt, but more strongly, as Marjory herself had felt when she went into Pitcomlie with the news of Tom's illness. This secret, which was in his keeping, made him almost a traitor; he stole through the drawing-room, along the silent passage—nothing but sunshine seemed in the house—soft sunshine of the Spring, and fresh air, a little chilled by the sea, full of invigoration and sweet life. He knocked softly at the

library-door, feeling his heart beat, as if in his very look the poor father must read the secret. There was no answer; he knocked again; how still it was! Just as a traveller might have gone into an enchanted palace, seeing signs of life about, careful order and guardianship, but no living thing; just so had he come in. The rooms were empty, swept and garnished; there was not a sound to be heard but the steady ticking of the great old clock, which stood in the hall, and the throbs of his own heart; and still no answer to the knock. Persuaded that Mr. Heriot must have gone out, Fanshawe opened the door softly to peep in, and make certain before he returned to Marjory. To his surprise, the first thing he saw was that Mr. Heriot was in his usual place, in his usual chair, calmly seated at his writing table, paying no attention. The opening of the door, and Fanshawe's suppressed exclamation, "I did not know you were here, Sir," disturbed him apparently as little as the knocking had done. Fanshawe had no message to give; he had forgotten even to make up any pretext for his visit; he said hastily, now feeling half ashamed of himself: "There is a book here I want to consult, if you will permit me," and without waiting for an answer, he went hastily to the shelf, where stood a number of tall county histories—books which Mr. Heriot prized. Turning his back on the old man at his table, he hastily selected one of these books. "I fear I disturb you, Sir," he said, in the easiest tone he could assume; "but in the first place, I thought you had gone out; and in the second place, I knew my busi-

ness would not occupy a moment. I will put it safely back."

Somehow, it seemed to Fanshawe that a tone of levity had crept into his own voice; he spoke jauntily, as a man who is playing a part is so apt to do, and the light-minded tone came out all the more distinctly because this speech, like the others, received no answer. No answer; how still the room was! the fire burning brightly, but noiselessly, the sunshine coming in through the great window, nothing stirring, nothing breathing. Mr. Heriot had not moved; he had never even raised his head to look at his visitor; through all the fretfulness of his temper to the others he had never been but polite and friendly to Tom's friend; and this strange rudeness struck the intruder all the more.

It seemed to Fanshawe as if a cold air began to blow fitfully in his face; and still Mr. Heriot did not move; he had not even raised his head to look at his visitor. Fanshawe stood still in the middle of the room hesitating; and then a curious moral impression, conveyed by the stillness, or by a subtle something more than the stillness, crept over him, he could not tell how; an icy chill went through him. It was cold he supposed, though why it should be cold in that warm room, with the fire burning and the sun shining, he could not tell. He approached a step nearer to the master of the house. "Mr. Heriot!" he said.

No answer still; not a word, not a movement. Was he asleep? Fanshawe drew nearer still with a shuddering curiosity. The old man's elbows were

leaning on the table; one hand was extended flat out, every finger at its full length. The other held by a book which was supported on a reading-stand. His eyes were fixed upon this book with a heavy, dull stare, his chin dropped a little. Had he fainted? Fanshawe drew closer and closer with a certain fascination. The long, listless hand upon the table lay grey and motionless, like something dead. Good God! was it death? But how could it be death? He had not heard the news. There was no reason why he should die in that tranquil brightness, everything so still around him, no murmur in the air of what was coming. It was impossible. In his certainty of this, Fanshawe touched the motionless hand. He withdrew instantly, with a hoarse and broken scream; the unexpected touch unmanned him. He called aloud for Marjory in his awe and terror—yes, terror, though he was a brave man. Marjory was seated, hopeless, in the sunshine, trying to subdue her own misery, trying to think how she could tell her father. But her father had stolen peacefully away, out of reach of that miserable news. He had gone out of hearing; nothing that could be said to him would move him more for ever.

Fanshawe stood in an agony of momentary uncertainty behind the chair. What should he do? It seemed to him terrible to leave this ice-figure propped up here, without human watcher near. He called for Fleming with a paralysed sense of helplessness, without even the hope of being heard; and it seemed to him that the moments which passed

were years. At length he was relieved in the strangest way. The door opened softly, and some one came in. He thought at the first glance it was one of the women-servants.

"Call Fleming to me; call Fleming, quick!" he cried.

The new-comer took no notice. She made no immediate reply. A small figure dressed in black, with curls clustering about her head, and a sweet but gently-complacent smile. She advanced towards the table smiling, making a sweeping curtsey. She did not look at Fanshawe, but at the figure in the chair, which to her was not awful. It was terrible to see this smooth little woman, in all the confidence of one who knew herself sure to please, with her conventional salutation, her company smile, coming calmly up, knowing nothing. She addressed herself to him who sat there with deaf ears, not seeing her.

"I do not know Fleming; I am Verna," she said.

CHAPTER XVI.

It would be hopeless to describe the condition of Pitcomlie during the rest of that terrible day. In the hall was the young widow with her children, an important English nurse, and the Ayah with the baby—the children crying, the Ayah moaning, and Mrs. Charles wondering why no one came to receive her; while in the library the scene was occurring which we have described. Marjory was still seated on the steps of the sun-dial. She had not heard anything; or rather some dim perceptions that something had happened had penetrated her stupor without rousing her to think what it was. Her whole mind was absorbed with one thought. She had not even time to grieve. She had to tell her father. Of all that had ever fallen upon her in her life, this was the hardest to do. She allowed herself this interval of calm, because she was awaiting the return of her messenger. It was a pretext, she felt; but she took advantage of the pretext with such eagerness! and, perhaps, after all, he had gone out; perhaps she might have another moment of respite—perhaps—

Then she became vaguely aware of some commotion in the house. Milly was the first to rush out upon her.

"Oh! May, there's such funny folk in the hall; a black woman! with a white thing over her head

—and little babies. Come, come and see; they're all asking for you; everybody wants you. Come, come and see."

"Babies!" said Marjory; and then, in spite of herself, burst into sudden tears.

The thought made her heart sick. It seemed impossible to rise up and welcome them, to receive these strangers in this first hour of trouble. Then Fleming, looking very pale, hurried across the lawn. The old man was heart-broken, but he could not be otherwise than acrid.

"This is a fine time to sit here and divert your-sel', Miss Marjory," he said, "when the house is full of strange folk, and no a soul knows what to do first. They've come; and mair than that—you'll know soon enough, soon enough; but Lordsake!" cried the old man, putting Milly aside almost roughly, "send that bairn away."

Marjory rose up, dragging herself painfully back into the busy world which awaits all the living, whosoever may be gone or dead. Then Mr. Charles was seen hurrying through the open window.

"What is this, May? What is all this I hear?" he cried. The news had been told to him by the servants, without any preparation, thrown at him in a lump as servants are fond of doing, and he was stunned by the succession of events. It seemed to him impossible to believe in their reality till he had come to her, who was the centre of the family life. Little Milly crying out of sympathy, knowing nothing, clung to her sister's dress—and Mr. Charles eager and anxious with his long lean person all in

tremulous motion, put his hand on the sun-dial to steady himself, and with agitated and white lips asked again, "What is it, May?" And at the other side of the house there suddenly appeared Fanshawe, supporting a lady on his arm. Marjory's bewildered mind fixed upon this. It was the only thing she did not understand. He placed the stranger on a seat and hurried across the lawn. "Give the lady a glass of wine," he cried peremptorily to Fleming, and then took Marjory's hand and drew it within his arm.

"Come in-doors," he said briefly, almost sternly, "they all fly to you, and it is you who ought to be considered most. Come in-doors."

"No," she said, "no, I must do it first; if they have come I must do that first, he must hear it from me."

"Come in," said Fanshawe peremptorily; but before he could lead her away, the stranger, whom he had brought to the air, came forward to Marjory.

"I am better now," she said. "I never fainted in my life before. It was such a shock. I know you are Miss Heriot, dear, and I know what you must be feeling. Don't mind us; I can look after everything, I know how to make myself at home. Oh, poor thing, poor thing! father and brother in one day!"

"What does she mean?" said Marjory.

"My dear May, my dear May!" cried Mr. Charles. "Lord bless us! she does not know! Come in, come in, as Mr. Fanshawe says."

"Father and brother in one day? then my father is dead," said Marjory. She put both her hands on Fanshawe's arm, holding herself up. "Did you tell him? did he hear?"

"He had died in his chair, quite calmly, before the news came."

"You are sure—quite sure, he did not know?"

"Quite sure."

"Then thank God!" said Marjory. "Oh, I am glad. Don't say anything to me—I am glad. Milly, Milly, don't cry, go and say your prayers. I can't think of Charlie just now. I am so glad for papa."

"Oh, my dear! she has gone mad with grief," said Mr. Charles. "May, my bonnie May, cry, break your heart, anything would be better than this."

"I am not mad, I am glad. Thank God!" repeated Marjory. She suffered them to take her in, with a calm which frightened them all. Thus the chief actors, in all the excitement of a terrible crisis, went their way off the scene like a tragic procession, carrying with them their atmosphere of pain and trouble; and like the change in a theatre, another set of sentiments, another group of persons, came uppermost.

Miss Bassett was left in possession of the lawn. She had received a shock, but she felt better already, and she was a curious little personage. She watched them go in, making her own observations, especially in respect to Fanshawe, whose presence struck her feminine eye at once. Who was he?

engaged to Miss Heriot, she concluded; it was the most natural explanation. Then she went across the lawn to the edge of the cliff and looked over; then made a turn or two up and down, putting up an eye-glass to her eye, inspecting the house. The house was very satisfactory; it had an air of old establishment, wealth, and comfort that pleased her.

"Only .. would clear away all these old ruins," she said, turning her glass upon the tall old Manor-house of Pitcomlie, and Mr. Charles's tower, "and throw out a new wing," she added, putting her head a little on one side, "with a nice sheltered flower-garden and conservatories." This notion pleased her still more. "What a different place it would look," she continued musing, "if I had it in my hands; I would clear away all the old rubbish, I would make a handsome entrance with a portico and steps. I would soon make an end of all those little old-fashioned windows, and have plate-glass everywhere. Dear me, dear me, what a pity poor Charlie was not the eldest son!"

From this it will be apparent that the new-comer was not aware of what had happened in the family upon which she had arrived so suddenly. When she had examined the house quite at her leisure, she bethought herself of the helpless party she had left in the hall, and made her way to them round the front, finding the way by instinct with a cleverness which never forsook her. "I wonder what they will do with Matty," she said to herself. "I wonder what the new Mr. Heriot is like. I have

seen his photograph, but I don't recollect. I wonder if he is married. If he is not married, Matty's little boy will be the heir-apparent, or heir-presumptive, is it? and they will make much of him. Fancy grown people like Matty and myself being tacked on to little Tommy to give us importance! If he was not Charlie's brother Matty might marry him. As for me, that does not seem my line; at least I have never done it yet, after being in India and all. It is droll how people differ. Matty is a fool and as selfish as a little cat; but she is the marrying one. Never mind, I shall do as well for myself. How awful that old man looked, to be sure—I shall dream of him all my life; but don't let's think of that. Oh, you poor dear Charlie, how nice it would have been if you had lived, and if you had been the eldest son!"

Fresh from this reverie she met at the door Mrs. Simpson, the housekeeper, who had just cleared the frightened and excited servants out of the hall, and was closing the shutters with her own hands, and crying softly between whiles with many a murmured exclamation. Miss Bassett was very conciliatory, almost respectful to the old servants.

"Can you tell me, please, where I shall find my sister and the children?" she said. "What a dreadful day for us to come, the day of your poor dear master's death! I am so sorry to give you so much more trouble on such a day."

"Oh mem, never name the trouble," said Mrs. Simpson, "if anything could be a comfort it would be the sight of thae dear bairns, that he didna live

to see, poor man. Eh, it's an awfu' lesson to the rest of us, to be taken like that without a moment's preparation, reading a common book, that could be of no use to his soul. Eh Sirs! In an ordinary way I'm no feared for death. It's what must come to us all; but death like that—"

"I am sure though," said Miss Bassett confidently, "by the look of his face that he was a good man. There was a believing look about him. I feel sure all is well with him, and if it is a loss to us, you know it is a gain to him."

"Eh, what a pious good young lady," said Mrs. Simpson to herself; "we maun aye hope so," she said aloud, but with much less certainty. She was a Seceder, and not quite certain of her master's salvation. "He didna take his troubles may be so well as he might have done. They say it's a sure sign of the children of light when they're resigned, whatever God sends; but oh, it's no for us to judge," said Mrs. Simpson, putting her apron to her eyes. "I hope you're better, mem. It was a sore trial for a young lady, going in like that to the presence of death I'll show you upstairs where the other lady is, and if you'll just ring there's a maid will see to everything. Meals and hours will be all wrong the day in this mourning house; but you're a considerate young lady and ye'll look over it—for to-day."

"Oh, don't trouble about us," said the newcomer, giving Mrs. Simpson one of her sweetest smiles, "I like you so much for being grieved for your master. Never think of us—" Miss Bassett

was very popular among the servants wherever she went. She gave a little nod and smile to a housemaid she met on the stairs. She was very conciliatory. The youngest son's wife's sister has little reason to think herself an important personage in any house; and as she went up the great staircase through the long noiseless carpeted corridor which led to the west wing, her respect for the house rose higher. She noted that the carpet was Turkey carpet, that every corner was covered, no matting, no boards visible, nothing that showed the least desire for economy. She was not used to any English house except the very thrifty one in which Matilda and she had received their education, and these details of luxury were very pleasant to her. She sighed as she went into the pretty room where her sister and the children were already established. It was the largest room in the wing, the end room with two large windows looking over the peaceful sunshiny country, and one in the side which had a peep of the sea. There were large wardrobes, a great marble dressing-table, a succession of mirrors, a magnificent canopied bed, and more Turkey carpets, feeling like moss beneath the feet. The handsome room, however, was already made into a disorderly nursery. Matilda had thrown her hat down on the writing-table, where it lay among the pens and ink, covered over in its turn by the children's hats and pelisses. She had thrown herself on the sofa, where she lay, tired and dishevelled, making ineffectual remonstrances with Tommy, who was belabouring the floor with an ivory-backed

brush which he had found on the dressing-table. Baby was sprawling on the lap of the dark Ayah, who sat squatted on the floor near her mistress's feet, and the English maid was unpacking all the boxes at once, finding all sorts of heterogeneous things in the different packages.

"Bother that black thing," she said indignantly as Miss Bassett entered, "here's baby's short things all bundled up in mistress's best shawl. There ain't a thing where I can lay my hand on it, and all the place in a litter already."

Miss Bassett did her best to remedy the muddle. She seized the brush out of Tommy's hand, and put him spell-bound in the corner. She pulled off her sister's shawl, which hung half over the arm of the sofa. She ranged the hats upon the bed and cleared the writing-table.

"Matty! for heaven's sake," she said, "we have come to a nice tidy place, and they seem disposed to treat you handsomely. This must be one of the best rooms, don't make a pigsty of it the very first day."

"I like that," said Matilda languidly; she was a pretty, listless, fair young woman, with light hair, without any colour in it, and blue eyes, which were somewhat cold and steely. "Where have you been to, Verna? You went and left us all by ourselves, to get on as we could; and but for that nice fat woman who brought us upstairs, I do not know what we should have done. Of course, the children must be made comfortable. She said we were to have all the rooms in this end. When you can

get them cleared away, and things put straight, I think I shall go to bed and have a good sleep."

"Then you don't want to know anything about the family?" said her sister.

"The family! oh, I suppose Marjory will come to see me by-and-by. I don't want her till I have had a sleep, and I told the fat woman so. I shall cry when she comes, I know; and it tires me out to cry. I want a sleep first. I suppose you have seen them all; you always see everybody first. Are they nice? do they look good-natured? do you think they mean us to stay here, or what am I to do? Who is knocking at the door? Oh, I know; it is the fat woman with the tea."

"Hush, for heaven's sake!" said Verna; "do think for a moment; everything depends on how you behave. Elvin, don't let anyone in just yet. Matty, listen; old Mr. Heriot—your father-in-law—Charlie's father, died this morning. The house is all in confusion."

"Died this morning!" Matilda's lip began to quiver, her eyes filled suddenly with tears, her face acquired all at once the pitiful look of a child's face in sudden trouble. "Oh," she said, "must some one be always dying wherever we go? It is dreadful. I cannot bear to be in a house where there is some one dead. I never was so in my life. Verna, take the baby; take us away, take us away!"

"I will kill you!" cried her sister passionately, turning on her, clenching her little fist in Matilda's face. "You fool! hold your ridiculous tongue when the servants come in; cry as much as you please;

you can do that. It will make them think you can feel, though you have a heart as hard—Cry! if you can't do anything else. Thank you very much," she said, turning round suddenly and changing her tone in the twinkling of an eye. It was Mrs. Simpson herself who had entered, attended by a maid with a tray. The housekeeper was deeply in want of some counteracting excitement, and she knew that the two babies on the floor were the only representatives of the house, though their mother did not. She came in with a jug of cream in her hand, very solemn and tearful, ready to weep at a moment's notice, yet eager to explain, and tell the sad story —full of natural womanly interest about the children, as well as anxiety touching the little heir and his mother. In short, the housekeeper was like most other people—she had good, maternal motives, and she had an alloy of interested ones. Had the young widow been a poor woman, Mrs. Simpson's kindness would have been more disinterested; but in the present circumstances, it was impossible not to recollect that the young woman crying on the sofa, who looked so innocent and childish in her sorrow, might be the future mistress of the house, and have everything in her hand.

"Oh, mem!" said Mrs. Simpson; "what is there we wadna do—every one in the house—for poor Mr. Chairlie's lady, and thae two bonnie bairns! Oh, Mistress Chairles! dinna break your heart like that! there's plenty cause; but think on your two bonnie lads that will live to be a credit to everyone belonging to them, and a' the hope now that we

have in this distressed house. Oh, get her to take some tea; get her to lie down and rest! So young and so bonnie, and her man taken from her, and a home-coming like this!"

"My sister is very tired," said Verna; "indeed, as you say, it is a very sad home-coming. She cannot thank you to-day, you kind woman; but to-morrow I hope she will be better. We have had a terrible journey. And she feels it so much," added the quick-witted creature, seeing Mrs. Simpson's eye linger upon Matilda's coloured gown, "having no mourning to come in; no widow's cap. You must tell me afterwards whether there is a dress-maker here whom we can have. What did you say, dear? will you try some tea? Cry! you fool!" she whispered fiercely, turning aside to her sister, "and don't speak."

"But, Verna—a cap!" Once more Matilda put on that piteous look; her lips quivered; large tears rolled down her cheek; she put her hand up to her pretty light hair.

"Yes, that is the first thing," said the wiser sister. "Will you please send for the dress-maker? Perhaps we can get her a cap in the village. That is all she thinks of; she would not like to see dear Miss Heriot without her cap."

"Miss Marjory is not in a state to see anybody," said the housekeeper, shaking her head; "she's taking her trouble hard—hard. She's no resigned, as she ought to be. And this is the little heir? Eh, my bonnie man! but I'm glad, glad to see you here!"

"Yes, this is the eldest," said Verna, puzzled; "he is called Tom, after his poor grandpapa. Then young Mr. Heriot is not married?"

The housekeeper shook her head solemnly. "Na, na! Mr. Tom wasna a man to marry; and oh, to think the auld house should depend upon a little bairn."

Then the good woman put her apron to her eyes. Verna watched her every look and movement, and already her attention and curiosity were awakened; but she would not show her ignorance of the family affairs; and she was glad to get Mrs. Simpson out of the room, fearing the outburst which was coming. It came almost before she had closed the door upon the housekeeper's ample gown.

"Oh you cruel, cruel Verna!" cried the young widow. "Oh you barbarous, unfeeling thing! a cap! I will never wear a cap; as if it was not bad enough to lose Charlie, and come home here like this, and cry my eyes out, and have to please everybody; instead of my own house, and being my own mistress, as I was while dear Charlie was living; but to put on a hideous cap—I will not, I will not! With light hair it is dreadful; I will rather die!"

CHAPTER XVII.

The situation of the little party of strangers in the west wing of Pitcomlie for the week after their arrival was strange enough. They were in the house, but not of it. Partly on pretence of their fatigue, partly because of the agitated condition of the family, they were not asked to go down stairs, and it was the second day before Marjory even paid them a visit. On the afternoon of their arrival Mr. Charles went solemnly upstairs, and kissed the babies, and shook hands with his new niece. Mrs. Charles had been carefully tutored by her sister, and she had so many grievances on hand that she was ready to cry at a moment's notice. First and foremost of these was the cap, which had been found in the village, a hideous head-dress indeed, made for some elderly village matron, which drowned Matilda's poor pretty face within its awful circlet. She resisted with all her might, and cried, and struggled; but having no one to back her, gave in to superior force at last, as was inevitable.

"The uglier it is, the more they will feel that you are in earnest," said Verna, with an energy that carried everything before it.

And when Mr. Charles came in and paid his respects solemnly, his heart smote him for all the evil things he had said about her, when he saw the

tears stealing from under Matilda's long eyelashes, and that piteous quiver of her lip.

"Some people do themselves much injustice by their style of writing letters," he said to Fanshawe, that evening. "She may not be very wise, but she has plenty of feeling."

She scarcely spoke at all during this interview, but cried and gave him a look of hopeless yet affecting sorrow, which went direct to the old man's heart. The little boy was disobedient, but that was nothing to be wondered at after a long sea-voyage and all that had happened; and as clever Verna thought, the terrible widow's cap intended for old Mrs. Williamson at the post-office, gave the young widow worship in the eyes of all who beheld her. Verna won herself worship in quite a different way. She put on the most becoming hat she had, and strayed down in the evening to get a little air. The first evening she saw no one. The second, Mr. Fanshawe came out and walked with her round the lawn, where she had seen Marjory first.

"How is Miss Heriot?" she asked, anxiously; "is she better? Was she so much devoted to her father? I am very, very sorry for her; but my poor Matty wants comfort too."

"Miss Heriot has been ill," said Fanshawe. "She has had so much to bear—one shock after another."

"Yes; Charlie's death," said Verna, watching him with keen eyes, "and then Mr. Heriot's—"

"And her elder brother—so very short a time before."

"Her elder brother?"

"I forgot. You left India before the news could have reached you. Three of them have been swept off one after another. Mr. Heriot died of grief; he never got over poor Tom's death. The shock to Miss Heriot was not so much her father's death, as her certainty that yesterday's news would kill him. All this has affected her deeply. We had almost to force her to do nothing, to see nobody except ourselves—to allow herself to rest."

"You have a very deep interest in Miss Heriot?" Verna asked, hesitatingly. She did not even know his name. "Or perhaps—I beg your pardon, I am only a stranger—perhaps you are one of the family?"

Fanshawe had started slightly; he had looked up at her with a sudden movement when she made that suggestion. It had brought the colour to his face.

"I—take a deep interest in all the family," he said. "No, I am not one of them. My name is Fanshawe. I was with poor Tom Heriot when he died. I am glad to be of use at this moment as far as I can."

"Oh, I beg your pardon. I did not mean to put embarrassing questions," she said. "Please forgive me; I am quite a stranger. Poor Matty does not know much, never having been at home since she was married; and I know nothing at all. We did not know Mr. Tom Heriot was dead. What a terrible thing! father and two sons—all the sons—there are no more?"

"No more—the whole family—except Miss Heriot

and her little sister, and your sister's boys—have been swept away."

Verna's heart was beating wildly. She could scarcely contain the sudden flood of triumph that had poured into all her veins. At last she was going to be a great lady. Everything would be in her hands. Marry! why, what was marrying to this? But she restrained herself, to make assurance sure.

"Poor little Tommy," she said, with a demure and measured tone, which was put on to hide her emotion, "only three years old; is it possible that he is the master of all this—that everything depends on him?"

"Poor child!" said Fanshawe.

What a farce these words seemed! Oh happy child, blessed child, most fortunate baby, with eighteen years of a minority before him, and his aunt, Inverna Bassett, the only clever one of the family to do everything for him! But she dared not betray the exultation that coursed through all her veins.

"I hope Miss Heriot will come to see us tomorrow," she said. "It will be better for—all of us—if she will be friendly and come."

Somehow there was a change of inflection in this which caught Fanshawe's ear. He was quite incapable of defining what it meant. The rapid revolution of sentiment, the change from humility and doubt into superiority and certainty, the implied warning, too delicate to be a threat, that it would be better "for all of us" that the daughter of the house should visit its new mistress, all these grada-

tions of thought went beyond his capacity. He did not understand; but still his ear, though not his intelligence, caught some change in the tone.

"I do not think," he said, with some coldness, though he could not have told why, "that we shall be able to persuade Miss Heriot to rest beyond to-day."

"I am glad of that," said Verna. "I mean I shall be very glad to see her. I saw her, it is true, yesterday, here, but she did not notice me. Of course it was a terrible moment for her—and for all of us," she added, with a little meaning. "Matty's first coming home—"

Was there a little emphasis on that last word? Certainly there was a change of tone.

Fanshawe was confused; he could not quite tell why. As for Verna, her little brain was in a whirl. She wanted to be alone to think. She put up her eye-glass once more, and inspected the house with such a wild sense of power that her faculties for the moment seemed taken from her.

"Good evening," she said, hastily. "I think I will go back to my poor sister, who has no one but me to take thought for her."

How everything had changed! She had no need now to be civil to anybody; no need to put on any mask, or restrain her real feelings. She rushed into the house, and upstairs, full of her discovery; but before she reached her sister's room, her steps grew slower, and her thoughts less eager. Verna was ignorant, very ignorant. How did she know that there might not be some law, or some will, or some-

thing that would modify this too delightful, too glorious state of affairs?

A little chill crept over her. Little Tommy's heirship might not be absolutely certain, after all. If it was certain, would not everything have been turned over to Matilda at once? Would Miss Heriot still venture to give herself airs as if she were the mistress of the house? Would she not rather come humbly to them, and do her best to conciliate and find favour in the eyes of the new mistress? Verna would have done so; and it was hard for her to realise the emotions of so very different a woman, whom, besides, she did not know. The result of all her musings, however, was that she would for the present say nothing to Matilda. She would leave her for the moment in her uncertainty, wondering what the family meant to do with her. Matilda might be kept in the desirable state of subjection so long as she was thus humble in her expectations; but Verna knew that when she was mistress of Pitcomlie she would no longer consent to cry and to abstain from talking.

Accordingly, she concluded to keep her news to herself. When she entered the room where her sister still lay on the sofa, chatting with her maids, and shrieking now and then an ineffectual remonstrance against Tommy's noisy proceedings, there came into Verna's mind a sudden and sharp conviction of the foolish mistakes which Providence is always making in the management of the world.

She had made up her mind that it was she who was to reign in Pitcomlie if Tommy turned out to

be really the heir; but how would she have to do it? By means of coaxing, frightening, humouring, and keeping in good disposition this foolish sister, whom she had been half ashamed of for her silliness all her life. Matilda would be the real possessor of all these advantages. She herself would only enjoy them as Matilda's deputy. Oh! if the Powers above had but been judicious enough to bestow them direct upon the person justly qualified! This sudden thought made her sharp and angry as she went into the luxurious room, which Matilda had turned into chaos.

"What a mess everything is in!" she cried. "Elvin, for Heaven's sake get those things cleared away, and try to be something like tidy. They will think us a pack of savages. Matty, why don't you exert yourself a little? I declare it is an absolute disgrace to let everything go like this. We are not in India, where one can't move for the heat. And what if Miss Heriot were to come up now and find you like this, all in a muddle, baby crying, and Tommy rioting, and your cap off?"

"I have as good a right to do what I like as Miss Heriot has," said Matilda, pouting; "and I hate your odious cap."

"You have got to wear it," said the peremptory Verna, picking up the unfortunate head-dress from the floor; "and if I were you I would rather wear it clean than dirty. As it is so late, Elvin may put it away carefully in a drawer; but, Matty, Miss Heriot—"

"Oh! how I do hate Miss Heriot!" said Matilda, ready to cry.

"You don't know what she may have in her power," said Verna, with a curious enjoyment of the picture she was about to draw. "She may be able to do everything for you, or perhaps nothing; how can we tell? But in the meantime it is better to have her good opinion. Do as I told you; talk as little as you can, and look as pitiful as you please. Probably we shall have to go to the funeral; or if not to the funeral—we can say you are not well enough—at least to the reading of the will, and that will be very important. Nobody can expect you to do anything but cry. Whatever you may hear, Matty, for God's sake don't commit yourself to say anything. Leave it all to me. It will save you ever so much trouble, and you may be sure it will succeed better. You know you are not so quick as I am; you are a great deal prettier, but not so quick. Now do promise, there's a darling. Take your best handkerchief, and tie your cap well round your face, and cry all the time; not noisily, but in a nice ladylike way. It will have the very best effect; and if you promise, it will leave my mind quite easy, and I can give my attention to what is going on. Now, Matty dear, won't you do as much as this for Tommy's sake and for me?"

"Is the funeral to be to-morrow?" said Matilda, putting off the formality of the promise.

"Why, I tell you again this is not India, you silly child," said Verna. "It will not be, I suppose, till this day week, and there will be hosts of people.

I shall have quantities to do without looking after you. Now promise, Matty! If you don't, I can't answer for what may happen; they may send you back to papa—"

"I will do whatever is best," said Matilda, moved by this horrible threat. "Tell me what is best, and I will do it. Oh, they never could think of that! They must give me so much a year at least, and some place to live in. I could not go back to papa to be snubbed and treated like a baby, and hear the dear children sworn at, and never dare venture to speak to anyone. I would rather die."

"If you are good, and do what I tell you, it will never happen," said Verna, kissing her. "I have a great deal in my head, Matty. I have heard something—but never you mind. I will tell you when I have found it all out. I should not wonder if we were to be very well off, and never to require to do anything after this but please ourselves. Hush! don't agitate yourself. You can't think what a deal I have to think of; but we shall know all about it when the funeral is over, and how it is all to be."

This had to content Matilda for the moment, and she went to bed with her head buzzing with all kinds of pleasant thoughts. Poor Charlie! it would have been much "nicer" if he had lived; he gave her a great deal more of her own way than Verna did; he was more of a comfort to her—and then a woman is always of more consequence when there is a man behind her to be appealed to. But still, now that poor Charlie was dead and gone, and no thinking nor crying could bring him back, per-

haps it might be for the best. If the old gentleman had left him something very nice in his will, as Verna seemed to expect, Matilda thought she would go to some bright nice place where there would be good society, and bring up Tommy. Perhaps she might be able to have a carriage, if it was as much as Verna thought—and never would require to think twice about a new dress, or a pretty bracelet, or anything she might fancy. These gentle fancies lulled her as she went to sleep. Yes, it was a pious thought, such a thought as ought to be cultivated in the bosom of every woman; perhaps after all it might turn out that everything had been for the best.

Verna was not so pious. She sat at her open window half the night, though the air was chill, with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes. She could not quite persuade herself that it was possible. "If—" she said to herself, before she set off on a wild canter of imagination through all the glories that could be thought of. If—

What a thing it would be! To be virtual mistress of this house, to have everything in her power, to be able to turn out "the family" if she pleased, and make her own will superior everywhere! This hope intoxicated the young woman. The instinct of managing everybody and everything had been strong in her all her life; but it never had had full scope. She had managed her father's house, but that was little; and he himself was a rough man, who despised women, and was not capable of being managed. Now what unbounded opportunities would be hers—the estate, the house, the village,

nay, the county! Verna's ambition leaped at all. And she never intended to rule badly, unkindly, or do anything but good; Matilda should be as happy as the day was long, she said to herself; Tommy should be sent to the best of schools. She would be as polite as possible to the Heriots, and beg them to consider Pitcomlie as their home as long as it suited them.

She meant very well. She would get up coal clubs, and clothing clubs, and all sorts of benevolence in the village. She would be a second providence for the poor people. Never were there better intentions than those which Verna formed as she sat at the window, her eyes shining with anticipation, if—

That was the great thing. The foundations, perhaps, might fail under her feet; it might all come to nothing; but if—

What a good ruler, how considerate of all the needs of her empire she meant to be! People so often prospectively good in this world; whether their goodness would come to nothing if they had the power, it is impossible to tell; but hoping for it, looking forward to it, how good they mean to be!

That these feelings should exist above stairs, while such very different emotions were in the minds of the family below, where two deaths had occurred, as it were, on one day, need not surprise any one. Verna had been very sorry for the sufferers; but it was not in the nature of things that she could be more than sorry. Her own affairs were nearest to her. They and she inhabited different spheres.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"WHAT did you think of them?" said Fanshawe.

"She cried a great deal; she is very young and pretty. Poor child!" said Marjory. "We did not say much to each other; how could we? Indeed, you know that I cannot talk."

"I know—" said Fanshawe hastily, and then stopped short. He had done everything for them all during those sad days. It was the eve of the funeral now, and it was he who had taken every necessary care upon him; but I cannot explain how he had grown into the house. They were strangers to him a very short time before; even, it was not long since he had yawned and asked himself why he did not go away? But now it seemed to him that he had lived there all his life; that he had never had any warmer interests; that he could as soon separate himself from his life as from all that remained of the diminished family. He had brought Marjory out as her brother might have done on the eve of that melancholy ceremonial, to breathe the fresh evening breeze, and accustom herself a little to the outer world once more. He had led her, not to the cliff, but to the garden, where the associations were less overwhelming.

The flower-garden was at the other side of the

house, sheltered from all the sea-winds by the old Manor-house on the East, and warmly nestling into the angles of the present mansion. It was an old-fashioned garden; there were no stiff flower-beds in it, no studies of colour in red and blue and yellow; no ribbons of brown leafage, or artificial lines. In summer, old roses, old lilies—the flowers that our grandfathers loved, stood about the borders, making the whole garden sweet; but at present, in the Spring, there was little except crisp lines of crocuses and snow-drops; at one side was an avenue of limes, which had, people supposed, been the avenue of the old house. These limes were not large trees, they were too near the sea for that; but they had begun to shake out their light silken green leaves in the soft April air.

It was here the two were walking on the eve of Mr. Heriot's funeral. The gate of the old house was still standing, ornamented with the cognizance of the Heriots, at the end of the avenue, and here there was still an exit upon the cliff; close to it was the door of the kitchen-garden. I explain this to show how the circumstances, which were about to happen, came to pass. Marjory had walked up and down the avenue three or four times—leaning on Fanshawe's arm. It had become natural to accept his arm, to take both physical and moral support from him. I do not know that either of them had ever gone further in their imaginations; Marjory, at least, had not. She had no time for any thoughts about herself. Ever since she had known Fanshawe, she had been absorbed in matters of a

very different kind. She took his support, his kindness, his sympathy, almost, I fear, as a matter of course, forgetting that she had no right to it; not entering into the question at all; accepting the help which was at hand without questioning what it was.

And Fanshawe, for his part, thought badly of himself when other thoughts would gleam across his mind by turns. He shook himself, as it were, and was angry, asking himself, "Is this the time?—am I the sort of fellow?" He was as far from contemplating marriage as a possibility as any good-for-nothing could be. Marriage! out of Marjory's presence how he would have laughed at the idea! But still there had been gleams of light which had passed across him, fitful glimpses of meaning, even of a kind of purpose, repressed instantly by a conviction of their utter vanity and foolishness. Sometimes, unawares, when he was thinking of other things, some sudden plan would come into his head, some vision would flit before his eyes; but they were always involuntary. He had not even recognised them so far as to struggle against them. They were stray visitants that came upon him without a moment's notice unawares, and that were driven away as intruders, without a moment's indulgence. But sometimes along with these visions, strange words would throw themselves in his way, and claim so urgently to be spoken, that it was very hard to resist them.

This was one of those occasions. In answer to her languid words, "You know I cannot talk," some

devil or other (he thought) thrust a passionate, too expressive answer into his mind. And he had, so to speak, to stoop and pick it up, and throw it from him like a firebrand, before he could continue the calm conversation in which they had been engaged.

"You are getting tired, I think," he said, anxiously. "Come and sit down here."

"I am not tired," said Marjory. "It is wrong to think that because the mind is worn out the body must be tired too. Does it not sometimes seem all the stronger? I think it would be best to be ill; but as I am not ill, what can I do? I can't pretend. I am not tired, except of doing nothing, of being cooped up, of being good for nothing—"

"That is what I am," he said, with a slight glance down upon her, and then turning his head away. "I am not of any use either to myself or to other people."

"How can you say so, Mr. Fanshawe? To us you have been everything that the kindest friend could be."

"For why? Because I liked it; because I have been so mixed up—pardon the homely word—with you and yours; not for any good reason; which I suppose, as I have been told often, is the only rule of value. Indeed, the great thing is that you have allowed me to stay, and made me, to my own surprise, good for something; not much even now. If I tried ever so often, in an ordinary way I should not know what to do."

Marjory made no answer. He had seated her on a bench under the lime-trees. He had been

standing opposite, but now he sat down by her. He had discovered before that she was not to be tempted into these personal discussions. She was twisting and untwisting her fingers vaguely, with a nervous habit, not thinking what she did.

"Life is so easy for some people," she said, at last, "quite clearly marked out, with nothing strange or complicated in it. It has always been so with us. I don't think it will be so in the future. I begin to feel as if the well-known, well-worn path had stopped, and I do not know what odd track may follow. I never understood the feeling before. Perhaps you, who have had more experience—you may understand it, I don't."

"That is what I mean," he said, "only I never had any well-worn path to lose. Mine is like this little byway close to us. A big old stone gate, with shields and all the rest, and nothing opening from it, except that irregular line on the turf. One keeps to it because there is nothing else to keep to. This will never be your case, but it is mine. I am good for nothing. Nobody comes in by me, or goes out by me—"

"Not like the path then," said Marjory, with a faint smile, "for there is some one knocking. Is it at the old gate or the garden door?"

It was twilight, and their bench, though completely hidden, was close to both entrances. In the little pause which followed, the knocking went on softly, and after a while the gardener was heard trudging along the gravel path with his heavy steps.

"Wha's there?" he said.

"It's me, Sir," answered another voice; and then after a pause—"a stranger, if ye please, that wanted to ask a question. I'll no keep you long. It's a Mr. Heriot, is't no, that lives here?"

"Ay, my woman," said the voice of the old gardener. "You may say that. There's been a Mr. Heriot here for as long as kirks have been standing or kailyards planted. But there's nae Mr. Heriot the now, for he died on Tuesday, and he's to be buried the morn."

"Eh, poor man!" said the other, in a startled tone, and she added, in a lower voice, "I never saw him, but I'm real sorry It would be him that had sons—two sons?"

"That's the maist mysterious part of a'," said the gardener, glad of a gossip. "He had two sons —bonnie lads, and strong lads, and like life. One of them went out to India, and married a wife; but the eldest wasna of that kind They are both dead within three weeks, the one after the other, the father and the two sons."

A cry, subdued, but strangely piercing and full of mingled awe and terror, rang into the air. Then the gardener spoke again.

"Does anything ail ye, lass? What's the matter? They're no a drap's blood to you that you should be that vexed. What are ye saying? Ay, there was a Tammas, the auldest son. They are a' Tammasses in this house—Tammasses and Charlies; but they're baith dead and gone! Are you greeting, lass? And what do you ken about the family? Losh me! She's greeting like to break her heart."

"I kent—one of the—young gentlemen," answered the stranger, with broken sobs.

"One o' the young gentlemen? Maister Tom was wild, I aye said it. It would be Maister Tom. It's no to your credit, my dear, no to your credit. A poor lass should have nothing to say to a young gentleman. Maybe it was away in England? but you're no English. It might be in the Hielands. He was aye ranting about here and there, taking no thought. Now, my bonnie lass, was it in the Hielands? You needna distrust me."

"It's no matter to you nor to naebody," said the other voice.

"Miss Heriot, where are you going?" Fanshawe said, in dismay.

Marjory had risen from his side in a noiseless ghostly way, and had crossed the path under the limes to a door in the wall, which led into the other garden. She disappeared in the darkness, while he sat wondering, and immediately after he heard her speak.

"You are asking after the family. You are sorry for us in our trouble. You may go, Sandy. I want to speak to her myself. Will you tell me if—you want anything?"

"Nothing," said the other voice, with sudden and evident self-restraint. "I'm sorry to have disturbed you, mem. I meant nothing but to ask a question on my road as I passed."

"But you knew my poor brother?"

"I've seen a Maister Heriot, that was said to come frae Fife."

"Will you come in?" said Marjory.

"I thank ye, mem, but I've nae time to waste. My errand's dune. I've a long road before me."

"If you will come with me I will let you out another way, which is shorter," said Marjory, in a conciliatory tone.

There was a momentary pause, and after some hesitating answer, Fanshawe heard the door of the other garden shut, and saw two figures come back instead of one. The new comer was shorter than Marjory. Her dress was tucked up as if for walking; but there was not light enough to distinguish her face. I think Marjory, in the new interest which possessed her, had forgotten Fanshawe. To his infinite surprise, he saw her grasp the hand of the country lass as she closed the little door in the wall, and heard her ask eagerly, in a half-whispering voice,

"Are you Isabell?"

The young woman drew back. She drew away her hand. She stood evidently on the defensive.

"I didna come here," she said, "to tell wha or what I am. Naebody here has anything to do with me. If you're Miss Heriot, I beg your pardon; but you're taking too much upon you with a stranger lass, that wants naething from you."

The listener rose to his feet; he was shocked and annoyed by what he thought the impertinence of the wayfarer, whose confidence Marjory had condescended to ask. But Marjory herself was not offended. She said hurriedly,

"Do not be afraid of me. I ask with no unkind

meaning. I would not hurt you for the world. What I want is that you should trust me, and tell me your story. I will do anything in the world for you, if you are Isabell."

There was another pause, as of consideration, and then the stranger replied,

"I canna say, mem, what you may mean. It's no for me to pry into your secrets, if you have secrets. There's many Isabells in the world, and that might have been my name, and me know nothing about you or yours; but my name's no Isabell, if that is any satisfaction. You said you would show me a short gait to Comlie—"

"I will," said Marjory, tremulously. They were walking slowly past Fanshawe, taking no notice of him, and with feelings that were not altogether delightful, he perceived that she had forgotten his very existence. "But you asked about my brother," she added, with soft tones of pleading, "and he is dead. Poor Tom! I want to know everybody he knew. Was it in—the Highlands? Will you tell me where you knew him? It is not for any harm—"

"Mem, I'm sorry to have put fancies in your head by my foolish question," said the resolute young woman. "What could the like of me ken of the like of him? I've seen him maybe three or four times; he was kind to some poor folk in our parish; and hearing the name on a journey, I knockit at the garden-door to ask what had come of him. I didna ken," she added, with a quiver of emotion, which she evidently did all she could to restrain, "that he was dead. I was struck to hear it, and

I'm sorry for you and all the family, with such a sore trial. If you are the only leddy, mem, I'm maist sorry for you."

"Thank you," said Marjory. "I have lost my father and both my brothers. I have nothing more left me in the world but one dear little sister. There is not a more sorrowful woman in all Scotland."

"Ah! but there is, though!" burst from the girl; and then she made a sudden pause, as if of obstinacy, and looked Marjory in the face defying her.

Once more Marjory took her hand. She wept as she spoke, pleading, crying, both at once, till Fanshawe, who was so close by, felt his heart melt within him, and could have cried too.

"Oh!" she said, "tell me who that is? I am sure you know something, though you will not tell. What can I say to show you that I am not an enemy. Do you mean Isabell?"

There was another painful pause, and once more the girl deliberated with herself.

"Wha is Isabell?" she said, at last, with a certain determination. "I ken many an Isabell that's in no trouble, and some that are. How am I to ken wha you mean?"

"And I cannot tell you," said Marjory, with despair. "That is all I know of her. She—knew—my brother; and so do you. She would be sorry for him, I am sure; and so are you."

"I told you, mem," said the other, resolutely, "my name's no Isabell. I'm no responsible for a' the folk that knew Mr. Heriot. I canna take upon me to answer for them. And if I said there was

in Scotland a mair sorrowful woman than you could be, oh, can the like of you ever be as sorrowful as a widow woman, a poor woman, a woman with hungry bairns, and no a morsel to give them? I've kent such: it goes against me to hear a young lady with plenty of siller and plenty of friends make such a moan; though I'm sorry for you," she added, after a pause, "real sorry for you too. And now will you let me see the short gait, or will I turn back and go the gait I came? for it's getting dark, and I dinna wish to be on a strange road at night by mysel my lane."

"Then you will not tell me anything?" said Marjory.

"I hae naething to tell you, mem," said the girl.

This strange visitor entered and disappeared through the Pitcomlie garden, while Verna was sitting at her open window, plotting and preparing all the things she would do, if—. Verna knew nothing of her, and had she known, would have been full of maidenly indignation at the idea that Marjory could notice "such creatures." Marjory, however, was of a very different mind. She led the girl through the flower-garden and through the house, anxiously guiding her to the light of the lamp in the hall, where she could see her face. She was but a comely country girl, nothing more, with fair hair twisted into a net, and a little brown hat with a plain ribbon. She might have been a respectable country servant, or a cotter's daughter. There was nothing in any way remarkable about her. She had

blue eyes, very steady and serious in their expression, and a firm mouth, which at present was closed fast, as if in fear of self-betrayal. She dropped a rustic curtsey as Marjory opened to her the great hall-door, and directed her how to go.

"You're very kind, mem, and I beg your pardon if I wasna civil," she said, with penitence.

Marjory stood looking after her as she disappeared into the night. Perhaps after all it was but a whim of her own, a fancy that had nothing in it. She turned away from the door with a sigh, and then the gust of chilly air which caught her from the garden, reminded her that she had left Fanshawe there, and that he must have heard all. She went slowly back to seek him, and make her apology, her mind, like the night, dark and wistful, full of chill airs and many clouds.

CHAPTER XIX.

If Tom Heriot's funeral had called all the gentry of Fife to do the family honour, it may be supposed that his father's, following so soon after, and in such circumstances of aggravated distress, brought out a still greater attendance. Mrs. Murray once more sat at the Manse window, with many tears, watching the mournful procession, and wondering much whether it would have been better for him had the Laird of Pitcomlie been "resigned," or whether it was well for the old man to be thus removed quickly, that he might not have sorrow on sorrow. It seemed to her that his was the lot she would have chosen for herself, and she thought tremulously as she wept, of her daughter in India, and prayed for her as she cried for poor Charlie Heriot. Miss Jean had not ventured this time to join Mrs. Murray at her window. The old woman was peeping from behind her blinds in the white gable, with eyes that shone at sight of the many carriages.

"Thomas Heriot may be proud," she said to herself, confused between the two deaths, and not feeling quite sure that her nephew was not in one of the mourning coaches enjoying the melancholy grandeur of which he was himself the object. All that was honourable in Fife was there, the old gentry, and the new people of wealth, and the

tenantry, and the town—even the fishers, smelling of salt water, though arrayed in the suit of "blacks" which it is a point of honour with that class to keep in readiness for a funeral. The churchyard was quite full of people, intent upon showing their respect for Pitcomlie.

It was Mr. Charles who had received and arranged all this miscellaneous assemblage. People at his age do not mourn for each other very acutely, perhaps because the separation cannot be a long one, perhaps because that grand final event has become so ordinary an occurrence. To the young it is less familiar, less close at hand. The older one grows, the more one is disposed to represent death to one's self as an every-day incident, and old men who are themselves approaching that verge are apt to dismiss somewhat summarily those who have preceded them. Besides, a week had elapsed between Mr. Heriot's death and his funeral, and that long interval of seclusion, and absorption in one idea, is enough to take the edge of all but the most sensitive feelings. It was anxiety more than grief that sat heavy on the brow of Mr. Charles.

"We must think now of the living, not of the dead," he had said on the previous evening.

And indeed there was reason enough to make that transference of solicitude, and to think of the living. For all the courses of nature had been driven out of trim, and no one of the party cared to confront the position, or ask themselves what was to come of it: except indeed Verna, who thought

of nothing else; but her thoughts would have been far from pleasing to the others had they known.

It was a long business to get all the sympathizing friends away, and to thank and shake hands with the distant hereditary acquaintances who once more had come so far to do honour to the Heriots. The house was in a curious excitement during this interval. All round Pitcomlie many carriages were waiting, and profuse hospitality was being dispensed by Mrs. Simpson and her maids in the servants' hall amid gossip, melancholy but consolatory.

Mr. Charles was doing his duty manfully in the dining-room, administering the excellent sherry, and making such serious remarks now and then as did not misbecome a mourner.

Marjory, with Milly at her feet, and Fanshawe, bearing her most sympathetic company, was in the drawing-room, where the shutters were still closed, letting in mournful lines of light through their interstices upon the group. She had felt herself "obliged" last night to tell him about Isabell. She was glad to feel herself obliged to do so, for her heart was aching with a desire for counsel and sympathy; and Fanshawe had taken her confidence very differently from Mr. Charles's mode of taking it. He had been interested and touched by the letter. He had even suggested at once that this was what poor Tom had intended to speak of; and he agreed with Marjory that the visitor who had so totally declined to tell who she was, or why she came, must have been somehow connected with the unknown Isabell. The secret, which was now be-

tween them, added another delicate bond to their friendship. He sat beside her now, talking it all over; suggesting, now one way, now another, of finding out who and where Isabell was. Tom had never mentioned such a subject to him—

"Which makes me," said Fanshawe, feeling abashed even in the gloom, "have all the more confidence that you are right, Miss Heriot. Had it been a—nothing, a—a mere levity—I don't know what words to use—he would have spoken of it; but not a serious and honourable love."

"Indeed, I am sure you do yourself injustice," said Marjory, even in her languor of grief, discovering, with surprise, that she was capable of a blush.

"No," he said, humbly; "men are ashamed of what is good oftener than of what is evil."

They were speaking low, that Milly might not share any more of the secret than was inevitable, a precaution which was vain. Milly took in every word, along with the gloom of the room and the lines of strange, pale eerie light, and the heavy, sad, and painful excitement of the moment. The scene and the story never went out of her mind; but it did not make her much wiser.

There was something about poor Tom, and something about some one called Isabell, and partial darkness and transverse lines of light, themselves so pale and dark, that they made the gloom rather heavier. Milly sat close to Marjory's knee, holding by her dress. The child could not bear to be without a hold upon something. When she let go, she seemed to sail away through some dark world

of shadows and misery, full of sounds of the distant wheels of the mourning coaches, and that solemn, dreary bustle which attends the last exit of every mortal from his earthly home. Twice in a few weeks this had occurred, and it gave a confused sense of permanency to the wretchedness, so far as the child was concerned.

To Marjory there was, perhaps—who can say?—a certain sense of fellowship and comfort in the companion with whom she could talk freely, and upon whose sympathy she could reckon, which made up for something. Little Milly, perhaps, who could not in reality feel all that happened half so deeply as her sister, was for the moment more cast down, enveloped in that vague dreariness of childhood which, while it lasts, is more deeply depressing than any maturer grief.

A very different scene was going on upstairs in the west wing, where the strangers were being clothed in their new mourning, in preparation for a solemn appearance at the reading of the will. Poor Matilda, covered with crape, and drowned in the big widow's cap, was as woe-begone as her sister could have desired, and cried more and more every time she looked in the glass.

"It is hideous with light hair," she said. "Oh! Verna, how cruel you are! They will think me eighty; they will not feel for me a bit. You know very well, when you have an unbecoming dress, men always find it out, though they never know what makes it unbecoming. And when everything

depends on the impression I make, for the poor children—"

"Oh! you little fool!" said Verna, to whom it must be allowed the deep mourning, with the delicate broad hems of her collar and wrists, was very becoming; "the only impression you have to make is that you are a wretched widow, able to think of nothing but your poor dead husband. If you had the heart of a mouse, you would be thinking of him to-day, and not of anything else."

"And so I am," said Matilda, with real tears. "He would never have made me wear this horrible thing. He liked to see me look my best, and always thought of me, and what I would like, before everything. You may be sure that so long as I am with you, who are a little tyrant to me, I shall never, never forget poor dear Charlie. And, of course, I want to look decent, for his sake. What are they to think of him, dear fellow, when they see me look such a dowdy, and with no money, nor anything. It is for Charlie's sake!"

Verna, however, was invincible even to this argument.

"There are a great many other things to think of to-day," she said. "Now, just remember what I say to you. They can't change what you are to have, because that will be settled by Mr. Heriot's will; but if you don't behave yourself as you ought, they can put you under trustees, or something, who will pay you out so much a month, or so much a year, and make you do exactly what they please. That's what you have to be afraid of. If they

think you look as if you could ever enjoy yourself again, be sure that's what they will do. I know them. If a woman looks as if she had not the heart to do a single thing, then they let her have her own way."

"Do you really think so?" cried Matilda, stopping short suddenly in her tears, and looking up to her sister with round eyes, staggered by this new suggestion.

"I am certain of it," said Verna. "And then, you know, poor Charlie's will leaves that old uncle guardian along with you. If you want to have any freedom, you must look as if you cared for nothing of the sort. And, Matty, I have just one other word to say. If you hear anything to surprise you, whatever it is, don't appear to take any notice. Now, recollect what I tell you. Don't jump up, or cry out, or make a fuss, if you hear that you are either better off or worse off than you thought. If you are left better off than you expect, you'll see these men will try to get the upper hand, and take away your freedom, unless you look as insensible as possible; and if you are left worse off, there are always ways of working upon them with a heartbroken widow. I don't want you to be clever and understand, for you can't; but you can *cry*. Here's a lovely handkerchief I got for you expressly. It is just a little too pretty. There is a row of beautiful small work above the hemstitch—too small for other people to notice much—and it will be a comfort to you."

"Well, it *is* a beauty," said the disconsolate

widow. "But all the same," she added, after a moment's pause, "I don't see why I should not understand my own business as well as you."

"Do you?" said Verna, turning round upon her, with flashing eyes.

Matilda quailed, and fell back.

"Don't look as if you were going to bite me," she cried. "Did I ever say I did? But that is not my fault. You never will let me manage anything; even Charlie wouldn't. But he did not tell me I was a fool, as you do. He said, 'I won't have my darling bothered!' Oh! dear Charlie! what I lost when I lost you!"

"That was a pleasanter way of putting it," said Verna, grimly; and then she, too, softened, and a glimmer of moisture came into the eyes which would have been fine eyes had they not been somewhat hard and beady. "He was a fool, too," she said; "a fool about you, as men are; but he *was* a dear fellow. You pink-and-white creatures have all the luck; you get men to be fond of you that are far too good for you, while people who could understand them—"

Matilda interrupted her with a low laugh.

"You were always envious of me," she said; and with her complaisance restored, and her pretty handkerchief in her hand, she made herself comfortable on the sofa, waiting the summons to go downstairs.

Poor little Tommy was *affublé*, like the rest, with paramatta and crape. He had a large sash of the latter material, which had the air of a hump and

two tails behind; and the paleness of the little Indian child came out with double effect from this heavy framework. Verna's quick eye noticed this, and felt that much was to be made of Tommy. She posed him at his mother's knee, and contemplated the group, and felt that no cruel trustee, no hard-hearted guardian, could stand against them. When she reflected that the guardian was only Mr. Charles, she felt triumphant. He certainly would never oppose her. And now the moment of fate approached; soon it would be decided whether Verna, by Tommy's means, was to have it; or, if—

What a relief it would have been to her mind, had she known that the estate was entailed, and that even Mr. Heriot's will could do nothing against that! but whether it is for want of education or not, certain it is that women know very little about such matters; and Verna's fine intellect was hampered by her ignorance. She knew nothing about the laws of entail, or whether a man could change them at his will and pleasure. She felt that the possible gain was so great, that there must be some evil possibility in the way, which would make an end of it. And this sense of a tremendous decision about to be made, wound Verna up to the highest pitch of excitement. She looked handsome, though she was not regularly handsome—almost beautiful in her emotion; her eyes sparkled, her colour was high, and the smile, which usually was too complacent, was swept away from her face altogether, leaving only an animated readiness to change in a moment from grave to gay, from calm to triumphant.

Her heart was beating under her new black gown as it had never beat in her life before. She had not lived till now, it is true, without some little movements of the heart—but none of them had at all approached in interest to this.

At last the summons came. With one final imploring supplication to Matilda to do nothing but cry, and to Tommy to be a good boy, she gave her sister her arm with every appearance of sympathy, and held out her other hand to be grasped by Tommy, who, being short, preferred her dress, to which he clung as for life and death. The maids stood admiring and sympathetic on the stairs, as this procession stole softly down. Tommy was whimpering with fright; Matilda put up her beautiful handkerchief to hide her face; only Verna was composed and sublime, supporting her widowed sister. In the darkened library, which was, like the drawing-room, full of lines of ghostly light from the joints of the shutters, everybody stood up as this group entered, and all hearts were filled with a certain thrill of sympathy. The chief places were given to the young widow and her sister. All the others seemed to group round them as a natural centre.

Mr. Charles stood with his back to the fire, interrupting the light which came from it by his long legs. He was very tired and very anxious, not knowing what the future was to bring forth for those most dear to him, and looking at the new-comers in the gloom which hid the expressions of their faces, with a wistful eagerness which was stronger

than curiosity. Nothing that happened could affect him personally, nor was he without the means to give Marjory a home; but there were more things involved than mere maintenance, and however things might turn out, it was certain that the whole family was on the eve of some painful change.

Marjory sat behind backs, very silent, not so much interested as any one else present, not caring much what happened. In no circumstances was it probable that she could have cared much for the mere personal consideration of how much was or was not left to her; and the idea of being compelled to leave Pitcomlie, and to give up all the habits and occupations of her life, had not occurred to her. I doubt whether, even had it occurred to her, the effect upon her mind would have been greater. The only thing that interested her specially was Tom's secret, the unknown story to which she seemed to have been brought closer last evening; and it was this which was going dimly, vaguely through her mind, while the others were occupied with things so much more immediately present and real.

Milly, as usual, was on a stool by her feet, pressing her golden hair against her sister's black dress; and Fanshawe stood near, behind the back of her chair, unseen, scarcely thought of, yet giving a certain subtle support. He had no right whatever to be here. The lawyer, Mr. Smeaton, from Edinburgh, had put on his spectacles to look at him, as he might have done had he been a big beetle conspicuously out of place. Even Mr. Charles had

hesitated a little before he said, "Are you coming with us, Mr. Fanshawe?"

Fanshawe would not have accepted so very uncordial an invitation to intrude into family mysteries in any other house; but this (he said to himself) was not like any other house; and Marjory had half turned round to look if he was following. Was not that reason enough? He felt somewhat uneasy when he found himself there, and in a false position. He got as far out of the way as possible, behind her chair. And then it gleamed across him that the others might inquire what right he had to stand behind Marjory's chair? No right! not even the right of an honest intention, a real purpose. He meant nothing; the tie between the two was entirely fortuitous, without intention on either side. What right had he to be there?

CHAPTER XX.

Mr. Heriot's will was an old one. As it was read, some of the listeners held their breaths with the strangest painful feeling of anachronism and sense of being suddenly plunged back into an ended world. Little Milly, wistful and dreary, cried at the merest mention that was made of her brothers' names. She was the one of all who had least personal knowledge of her brothers; but their names had become symbols of grief to her. The others listened with much outward quietness and internal excitement, while all the stipulations of that will which the father had made in full certainty of being survived by his sons, was read in the light of the fact that both his sons had preceded him to the grave.

The will set forth that there was twenty thousand pounds to be divided between the younger children; but that little Milly being provided for in chief by her mother's fortune, only three thousand was to be given to her, the rest being divided between the son Charles and the daughter Marjory of the testator. Mr. Smeaton paused to explain that this sum would not be fully realized, as some part of the property from which it was to be drawn had

much deteriorated in value; and went into further detailed descriptions of the property, and the cause of its deterioration, which tried Verna's patience to the utmost, and made Mr. Charles cross and uncross his long legs in nervous impatience.

Even wills, however, come to an end some time. When this was ended there was a pause. There were no unexpected stipulations, no wrong done to any one; all was perfectly just, kind, and fatherly. But this was not all. Except Matilda, who knew nothing, everyone in the room stirred with uneasy expectation when the reading came to an end. Matilda, for her part, obeyed her sister's directions closely; but that did not prevent her from making an anxious calculation in her mind how much was left of twenty thousand pounds when you subtracted three, and how much was the half of seventeen thousand. This was a mental operation which took her a long time and much thought, and she had not arrived at the other and more difficult and, in short, utterly insoluble question as to what income eight thousand five hundred pounds would produce, when Mr. Charles spoke.

"Is there no later will?" he said; "nothing made since the late sad changes in the family? no codicil? He might have made some memorandum, perhaps, of what he wanted to be done in the present melancholy case."

"Nothing at all," said Mr. Smeaton; "it was not a case to be foreseen. Such a thing, I daresay,

never entered into his head. Since both are gone, this poor little fellow must, of course, be named heir of entail, and guardians appointed — unless his father has appointed guardians."

"Not likely, not likely," said Mr. Charles; and both of the gentlemen looked at Matilda, who, thinking that she had done something wrong, hid her face in her handkerchief. This produced, as Verna expected, the most excellent effect.

"Poor young creature!" they said to each other. "It is too much for her, and no wonder."

"Miss Bassett," Mr. Charles added, gently, "perhaps you could rouse your sister a little to the necessities of her position. You know that in consequence of the death of my two nephews, Tom and Charlie, all the bulk of the property goes to that poor infant at your feet. Poor little man! You understand me? I daresay you have not thought on the subject, either of you. Poor little Tommy is the actual proprietor of Pitcomlie. It will be a great responsibility for his mother. Do you think you can make her understand?"

Matilda's handkerchief, which she held to her face, was violently jerked by the start she gave. There are some minds which are quick to self-interest, though dull to most things else. Mrs. Charles was of slow intelligence, but she heard and understood this. For a moment she made an effort to obey her sister; but then nature got the better of her. She flung the handkerchief on the floor, and appeared from under it, flushed and tearless.

"What!" she cried, with a suppressed but sharp scream.

The reality of her voice amid this subdued and conventional quiet, roused them all up like a flash of lightning; and Verna herself, for the moment, was too much overcome to interfere.

"Did she not know?" said Mr. Smeaton, aside, to Mr. Charles. "The fact is, the deaths of your brother-in-law and your husband, Mrs. Charles, have left your little boy the actual proprietor of Pitcomlie. Had I supposed that you did not know, I would have broken the news more gently—"

"Tommy!" cried his mother. "Tommy! Do you mean it all belongs to us—all? this house, and the money, and everything? Oh, Tommy! Are you sure —are you quite sure? Can't you be making a mistake? These things so often turn out to be mistakes; I should not like to believe it, and then find out it was not true."

Verna advanced with a warning air; but her sister pushed her away.

"Let me alone, Verna; it is my business and Tommy's. Please go on, go on. I can understand everything. Oh! make haste and tell me! All Tommy's!—and Tommy, of course, mine, being but a baby. Is it true?"

"It is true, so far as Tommy is concerned," said the lawyer, with a smile; "but for his mother—"

"There is a paper," cried Matilda; "Charlie

signed a paper. Verna, you have it; where is it, that last paper Charlie signed? You made him do it. I remember I thought it was silly, for what could it matter? It is something about me and the children. Give it to Uncle Charles; he is in it, too. Dear me! you are quick enough sometimes," said poor Matilda, in vulgar triumph. "Do not keep everybody waiting; where is it now?"

Verna put herself between her sister and the critical eyes that were, she supposed, inspecting her, and picking up the fallen handkerchief, restored it to its owner.

"Be quiet, for heaven's sake," she cried.

"Oh, why should I be quiet, I should like to know?" cried Matilda. "Don't stand between me and the people. If I am mistress of the house, I mean to be so, and put up with no nonsense. She has got the paper all right. Tommy, my precious darling! You shall have the nicest things money can buy. You shall never go to school, my precious, like common little nasty boys. You shall have——"

"Oh, you fool!" shrieked Verna, in her ear.

At the sound of these familiar words, and the suppressed vehemence with which they were spoken, Matilda for the moment came to herself. She looked round, and saw the wondering faces turned towards her. She saw suddenly that she had abandoned her *consigne*, and had got into deep waters, which she could not fathom; and with a

certain natural cunning, which her sister blessed, she suddenly fell a crying in her excitement. Then Verna began to breathe; the ball was again in her hands.

"Poor Charlie was very anxious about his wife and his children before he died," she said, "as was very natural, for he did not know if his father would approve of his coming home. He had not anything to leave, poor fellow, but he made his will. Here it is. It was partly his doing and partly mine, as my sister says. I brought it in case it should be wanted. Whatever Tommy—I mean the children—may have, he made her their guardian. My sister is very excitable"—Here Verna paused, as if forced to make some explanation. "She was afraid there would be nothing for the children. The revulsion has been too much——"

"Mrs. Charles seems, I think, quite able to speak for herself," said Mr. Smeaton. "This is the will of Charles Heriot, dated at sea, the 21st March. It's worth very little, I may tell you. It is quite informal. If the family choose to accept and act upon it, I have nothing to say; but otherwise it is good for nothing. It leaves everything of which he dies possessed to his widow, and appoints her and his uncle, Charles Hay-Heriot, of George Square, Edinburgh, the guardians of his children. That's so far well; it is a judicious appointment enough—unless," stooping his head, and speaking lower, he added, "unless the family think it proper to dispute it, when it is a simple piece of

waste paper. It all depends upon what you think, ay or no."

There was a pause. Matilda's interposition had made a painful impression upon Uncle Charles.

"What could we do?" he said, in an undertone.

"You could dispute this, and have guardians appointed by the court," said Mr. Smeaton. "But as you're named, and all's right otherwise, I do not see much reason why——"

Matilda heard this low conversation, but she did not know what it was about. She thought, like every narrow intelligence, that what she did not understand must be against her. And her feelings overcame her prudence and her awe of Verna.

"What are you all talking about?" she said, vehemently, sitting up quite upright in the chair which she had been reclining in. "What are you doing, plotting and scheming against my boy? You cannot take his birthright from him. Do you think I will stay quiet, as Verna tells me. Verna, hold your tongue, it is I that am the mistress, when my Charlie's will is being torn up, and our estate taken from us. No, I will not stay quiet. We must have our rights."

"Do not mind her, gentlemen," said Verna, piteously. "She is excited; she is never like this when she understands. Matilda, dear, no one is thinking of wronging you. It was this gentleman

who explained how things are. They will appoint another guardian, and take away your authority, if you don't mind. Be quiet, or they will take away your freedom. Matty! if they see you are excited and so forth, they will not let you have any of the power. Do you hear what I say? They cannot wrong you, but they will make you a slave; they will take away all your power."

This was said in a passionate whisper, close to Matilda's ear, who gazed at the speaker, open-eyed, first defiant, then gradually yielding.

"They are not to do anything against Tommy's rights. I will not stand and see my child lose his rights," she cried.

Verna sat down beside her, and took her hand, and carried on a close conversation in a whisper. It became half Hindustanee as it became vehement. The lawyer and Mr. Charles, after a moment's pause, made themselves into a separate group, and talked over the papers; while Marjory and little Milly behind, with Fanshawe looking on, formed another. The central point of the scene was in the two young women, full of excitement and passion, who were strangers, whom the house knew nothing of, and who yet were its future mistresses, with the wondering little boy in crape standing between them, holding fast by each, and gazing out with round eyes upon the strangers who filled him with a frightened defiance. You will think it strange that Marjory had no yearning of the heart towards this baby, who was Charlie's son; but, as children

have a perverse way of doing in such circumstances, little Tommy had not a feature which recalled Charlie. He was his mother's little staring image, her face, her expression, the very repetition of her look. Milly's heart was moved to him for the sole reason that he was "little"; but Marjory remained cold as the nether millstone to Charlie's boy. She sat, indeed, very coldly during the whole discussion. It sounded to her like a storm going on at a distance, which disturbs no one—the thunder mere echo, the lightning nothing but reflection. She looked at the two who were moved by feelings so much stronger than her own with a vague surprise, which only the curious stupor which hung about her could explain. She did not enter into their feelings. She was antagonistic to them, yet saw that but faintly. The whole scene seemed a dream, which would float away, leaving—what? Marjory's mind did not seem even active enough to inquire what it would leave behind.

Thus this strange scene ended, and everybody at Pitcomlie knew that a change—the greatest ever known in its records—had come about in the fortunes of the race. Other widowed ladies had reigned in the old house before now, but they had been kindly daughters of the country-side, trained in its traditions, and knowing what was expected of them. The new mistress was a stranger, knowing neither Fife nor Scotland, nor even English ways, knowing nothing about the family, nor what it demanded from her, and caring less than she knew. Mr. Charles, with care on his brow, took a "turn"

with Mr. Smeaton on the cliff. They discussed the matter very seriously, but they did not make much of it one way or another.

"If young Charlie's will stands, you will have to manage all the money matters," Mr. Smeaton said, "which will be the best thing for the estate; and perhaps you'll be able to get an influence over the widow. She'll give you a great deal of trouble, that young woman; but, on the other hand, she will understand nothing about business, and you will get your own way; whereas, if the will is cancelled as informal, you'll have another guardian appointed who may take different views; and she'll give plenty of trouble all the same."

"She's young," said Mr. Charles, with careful looks; "she'll learn better; but I'm an old man—too old to manage a child's property, that will not come of age for eighteen years."

"Toots!" said Mr. Smeaton; "you're not sixty. What ails you to live till the laddie's of age? there's plenty of your name have done it before you."

"My brother was but sixty-one," said Mr. Charles.

"Ay, ay; but the circumstances are different, they cannot occur again. On the whole, if I were in your place, I would stand by young Charlie's will."

This was the subject of conversation with the elders of the party, as the Spring afternoon came to

an end; very different from their subdued doubtfulness and care were the feelings of Matilda and her sister as they went upstairs. Matilda, for her part, did not want to go upstairs at all.

"I want to see the house," she said. "It is my own house now, and I have a right to see it. I don't see why I should be shut up in a bedroom—the mistress of the house!"

"Come along for to-day; we are to go down to dinner!" said Verna. "How could you see the house when all the shutters are closed, and everything shut up?"

"Let them open it, then!" said Matilda. "It has been shut up long enough—a whole week. What would anyone think of that in India?" But finally she allowed herself to be persuaded to go back to her room, as Tommy wanted his tea. When she reached that sanctuary, she plucked the cap from her head, and tossed it to the other end of the room. "That shall never go on again!" she cried. "Now I am my own mistress, I don't see why I should make myself hideous for anybody. You need not look shocked, Verna; you need not say a word. There are some things I won't do. I mean to be a good sister to you, and give you everything you want, but I won't have you sit upon me, and tell me what I am to do. You may be the cleverest, but I'm Tommy's mother, and I have the power to do what I like—and I will, too!" she cried, letting down her bright locks, which had been simply fastened behind to admit of the covering of the

cap. "Quick, Elvin, bring me all my pads and hairpins, and do up my hair decently. I won't go down to dinner a fright; you can put it on if you like, since you are so fond of it," she said, with a mocking laugh, as her sister picked up the unfortunate cap. Verna was not so happy as her sister; she had never been thus defied by Matilda before. Her brilliant hopes of sovereignty were overcast. If this rebellion was to continue, all her plans would be put out of joint. It was with a very rueful countenance that she picked up the discarded headgear, and looked on at the wonderful edifice of fair hair that was being built up over Matilda's low but white forehead. "I have not felt so comfortable since we left Calcutta," said that young woman, with a sigh of relief as she looked at herself in the glass. "Crape is not unbecoming when it is fresh; and, thank heaven, one can always have it fresh now."

"You speak as if you were glad you were a widow; you never think of poor Charlie!" cried Verna, in her discomfiture—glad to have some means of inflicting a sting.

"Oh, you cruel, unkind thing! as if I did not miss him every hour," said Matilda, with the ready tribute of tears which sprang up at a moment's notice. "He never would have allowed you to bully me as you do; he never asked me to do anything I didn't like; never called me a fool, as you do."

"He must have thought it many a time," said Verna spitefully.

"He did not; he was very fond of me—and I was fond of him, very fond of him!" cried Matilda; "but do you think he would have liked me to be tyrannized over, to make myself look hideous?—never. He would have liked to see me at the head of the table—"

Verna had not very fine or fastidious taste; but she had sense enough to perceive when anything was offensively out of harmony with the courtesies of life. She cried:

"For heaven's sake, Matty—for Charlie's sake, not to-night!"

"We shall see about that," said Matilda, complacently nodding her head; "it is for Charlie's sake, poor fellow; he married me without any money, or great connections, or anything. And I want them to see I am not such a dowdy, nor so plain, nor so insignificant as they think. For Charlie's sake, and to do him credit, poor fellow, I am determined to be mistress in my own house."

Verna was struck dumb; she was cast from her height of hope, and the fall stunned her. It was of no use now to call her sister a fool, though she was proving herself so in the most violent manner. Folly is not always obedient and submissive; there are times when it takes the upper hand, and then there is nothing so impossible as to move it one way or another. Poor Verna, in her little pride of cleverness, was actually cowed by the unexpected force of the heartless idiocy which she despised. It was stronger than she in that grand primitive power

of unreason, which is strong enough to confuse the best intellect, and break the stoutest heart in the world.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE drawing-room was but dimly lighted when the party at Pitcomlie assembled in it for dinner, and Matilda had been so little seen as yet, that the absence of her widow's cap made but little impression upon the small silent company. She came ini feeling somewhat triumphant, with her pretty har, rising in billows from the low white brow, which people had told her was like that of a classic statue. There was very little that was classic about poor Matilda, but she liked this praise. It sounded lofty and elevated; nobody had ever called her clever—but this seemed to approach or even to exceed the point of cleverness. After a momentary pause, Mr. Charles offered her his arm. He was about to place her at his own right hand at the foot of the table, as became a visitor. Matilda, however, stood holding him fast until all the party had entered the room. Then she said, looking round upon the company, "To save inconvenience don't you think I had better take my proper place at once?" and marched the unfortunate old uncle up to the head of the table. There she spread herself out complacent and delighted. "I always think when there is a change to be made it had better be done at

once," she said, beaming with a triumphant smile, with her jet ornaments twinkling in the light, upon the astounded party.

They were so entirely taken by surprise that a moment's confusion occurred, no one knowing where to place him or herself. Mr. Charles, helpless and amazed, was pinned to Matilda's side. To her other hand, Mr. Smeaton quietly looking on and enjoying the joke, led Verna, who was crimson with painful blushes, and not daring to lift her eyes. Marjory was the last to perceive the alteration that had been made. She was about to pass on to her usual place, when Fanshawe quietly stopped her, and placed her at the foot of the table. She looked up with an astonished glance, and met the triumphant eyes of the new mistress from its head. I am doubtful whether Marjory at the moment fully realized what it was. She gave a surprised look round, and then a smile passed over her face—could anyone suppose she cared for this? It hurt her a great deal less than it did Verna, who was her natural antagonist; but who thought it the most dreadful "solecism," and wondered what people would think. "They will think we are nobodies, and know nothing," Verna said to herself, and scarcely ventured to hold up her head. The company in general, indeed, was taken by such surprise that there was no conversation for a few minutes. Fleming's face as he placed himself behind Mrs. Charles's chair was a study of consternation and dismay. He carried the dishes to Marjory first, and pulled her sleeve and whispered,

"You'll no be heeding? the woman's daft, Miss Marjory, you're no heeding?" with an anxiety which regained him his character in Fanshawe's eyes.

"It is quite right," said Marjory in the same undertone. "She is the mistress of the house, she was quite right. It is best she should take her place at once."

Fleming marched round the table, shaking his head. He groaned when he served the new mistress. He called her Mistress Chairles till her patience was exhausted.

"Please to call me Mrs. Heriot," she said angrily.

"Oh aye, Mistress Chairles," said Fleming, "will ye take some chicken or some mutton?"

"If you do not call me by my right name I will send you away," cried Matilda. She was "daft," as he said, or rather intoxicated with satisfaction and triumph.

"You can do that, Mistress Chairles," said the old man indifferently, going on with his service. Deeper and deeper blushed poor Verna. Oh, what solecisms! what ignorance of the world! She did not know whether she should refrain from noticing, or whether she ought to excuse and explain her sister's conduct. The first was the most difficult, especially as her companion, the lawyer, looked on with suppressed amusement, and noted everything. Then Matilda began to entertain her neighbours on her other side.

"Is that gentleman—I don't know his name—at the foot of the table, a relation?" she asked.

"No," said Mr. Charles, who was just now coming to the surface after his consternation, "his name is Fanshawe, he is a friend of poor Tom's."

"Then he is engaged to Marjory, I suppose?"

"No," repeated Mr. Charles once more, still more blankly; and then he looked down to the other end of the table, where certainly Mr. Fanshawe was talking very eagerly to his niece, and added, "Not so far as I know."

"Ah, young ladies are sometimes sly in those sort of affairs," said Mrs. Charles. "I should think Marjory was one of the sly ones. Now I never can hide what I feel; but I suppose Marjory is a great deal cleverer than I."

Mr. Charles made no reply. He glanced at her confounded, without a word to say. Was this the little thing that had looked so gentle, and cried so bitterly? He was at his wrong end of the table, everybody and everything were out of their proper places. He was suddenly made into a visitor, he who had been at home here all his life.

"Where do you live, Mr. Heriot?" said Mrs. Charles, "it is dreadful to know so little about the family; but I always was an ignorant little thing. It would be so kind if you would tell me about everybody."

"Where do I live?" he said, "I have lived here most of my life—it is a difficult question to answer; though of course I have my house in George's Square."

"Where is that?" she asked; but waiting for no answer, added suddenly with an innocent look of curiosity, "and will Marjory live with you?"

"Matty!" cried Verna in an agony; nothing but solecisms! she thought.

"Would you think Verna was much older than I?" said Matilda, turning to the lawyer. "She thinks I ought to do everything she tells me; but when once a woman has been married, nobody has a right to tell her what to do except her husband. Don't you think so? One always knows one's own affairs best."

"It is common to say so," said the lawyer; "but for my part, I think we are all most clever in managing our neighbours' affairs."

This speech puzzled Matilda, who was silent for a moment. The party was so small, and the others talked so little, that these brilliant remarks were heard by everybody, except, perhaps, the questions about Fanshawe, which she had had the grace to make in a somewhat lower tone. Even Verna was so paralyzed by the whole proceeding, and by her sister's unparalleled audacity, that she had entirely lost her conversational powers. She plucked up a little courage now, and made an effort to regain the lead which she had lost.

"It is such a loss to go to India so young as we did," she said; "we make no acquaintance with our own country. Our ways are all Indian. We are as bad as the Americans for asking questions. The reason is that we are always meeting new people in

India. We should not know anything about them if we did not ask."

This speech raised Verna very much in the lawyer's opinion. It was clever, he thought, and good-natured, shielding the fool of a sister.

"I am sure you will be able to be of great service to Mrs. Heriot," he said, in an undertone. "Your good sense will show what is best. It may be a difficult business, and your brother-in-law's will is not worth a snuff if the family choose to oppose it. So she must not try their patience, you see, for old Charles Heriot, though very pleasant in his manner, is an old Turk when he's opposed. There is no saying what he might do," said Mr. Smeaton, enjoying the slander which he was uttering within hearing almost of the person assailed, "if his blood was up; and if your sister was to show any—well, incivility is a hard word, but you know what I mean—to Miss Marjory, Charles Heriot would take fire. You must advise her, Miss Bassett; you must advise her. Hoolie and fairly, as we say in Scotland, or as the Italians have it, *Chi va piano va sano.*" These words Mr. Smeaton pronounced as if they were broad Scotch; but Verna did not understand them, so it made little difference to her. And he added, "Everything here is long established, and hard to root up. You'll have to make your changes with great discretion, and take time to them. Everything will be made more difficult for you if auld Charles Heriot should take fire at any little affront, and flare up."

"Oh, thank you, thank you a thousand times for your advice!" cried Verna. "It is exactly my own

opinion, and what I have said to her over and over. But I did not know Mr. Charles Heriot was so hot-tempered; he looks mild enough."

"The very deevil—if you'll excuse the word," said Mr. Smeaton, "when his blood's up."

Perhaps Verna was the only one who was sorry when that dinner was over. She was anxious for advice, and to be thus fortified seemed to her of the greatest importance; and she received with religious faith those valuable hints about Mr. Charles Heriot's temper, among other things. When the ladies left the table, she tried hard to persuade Matilda to go to her room, under pretext of fatigue; but the young widow was obdurate.

"I want to see the house," she said, making her way, sweeping and rustling in her crape, to the drawing-room. Marjory followed, still with very little feeling of what had happened. But even Marjory was conscious of some painful feeling when she saw her sister-in-law laid luxuriously upon the little sofa in the bow-window, which was her own particular seat.

"Indeed, it is very comfortable," said Matilda. "You know how to be comfortable. This is your favourite place, is it not, Marjory? Poor Charlie used to tell me of the bow-window, and how it was made for you."

"Yes, I was fond of it," said Marjory.

"Then I hope you will always feel you have a right to it when you come to see me," said Mrs. Charles. "We shall change some things, no doubt; but you will always be welcome, Marjory. I sup-

pose you are to be married soon. You may think it would hurt my feelings to hear of a wedding, being a widow myself; but I am not so selfish. I am sure I congratulate you; he looks very nice indeed."

"There is nothing to congratulate me about," said Marjory.

It was hard upon her to hear the conversation between the sisters which followed, about new curtains and chairs that were necessary. It was not Verna's fault, who gave piteous, conciliatory looks at the daughter of the house. She bore it all as long as she could, and then she went noiselessly outside upon the cliff. The Spring was very mild that year. This was again a lovely night, with a faint blue sky all sprinkled with stars, and the vague, half-seen sea beneath, which sent up long sighing waves upon the rocks, not loud, but full of pensive moaning. There was a young moon shining, a moon covered with fleecy white clouds like a veil. Through the softened night rose the white rock of the May, with its steady light; and the lighthouse further off which Marjory knew so well, and which had so often turned and thrown a pleasant gleam at her across the broad waters, gleamed out all at once as she strayed round the well-known path. It was, perhaps, only Mrs. Charles's gracious intimation that she would always be welcome, which roused her to the sense that the time was approaching when she must leave this dear old home. It was not in Marjory's nature to make a lesser grief into a great one; and she had endured so much, that this additional trouble was not heavy to her, as it would have been in other

circumstances. But it gave her a certain sore feeling of pain and loss in the midst of her heavier burdens. It seemed hard to have such a subject thrust all at once, without a moment's notice, upon her. Her heart felt sore, as if a sudden new thrust had been made at it; sore with a feeling of resentment and impatient vexation. She strayed along the familiar round, the "turn" which she had taken so often, hearing now and then the voices through the half-open window; voices higher pitched and more shrill than any native to this locality. Even that difference of tone seemed somehow unreasonably offensive to her. She chid herself for the foolish feeling; but how could she help it? The moon gleamed softly upon the old Manor-house and on Mr. Charles's tower; there was a glimmer of half-dying firelight making his windows visible. Had Marjory known that her successor, Verna, had already planned in her mind how to pull all those ruins down!

She had not been thinking of Fanshawe, nor of any one, when he joined her suddenly; her thoughts had been all vague, full of that soreness which was almost a relief from the heavy stupor of her grief. She had seemed to herself, not suffering actively, but stupid in sadness; sad, sad down to the bottom of her heart; a state of mind not without a certain repose in it, which this other sensation of being wounded and injured shot across, now and then, like a thrill of life. But it seemed very natural to her when Fanshawe came to her side, more natural even than if it had been Uncle Charles. He held out his arm, and she took it only half consciously,

and with a kind of faint pleasure allowed him to lead her to the edge of the cliff, where the sea-line was visible, with the Isle of May rising well out of the waters, and the twinkling lights along Comlie shore marking out the length of the little town. Her heart was overwhelmed with this profound and gentle sadness; and yet there was a pleasure in it, too.

"Miss Heriot," said Fanshawe; "I want to have you a little while to myself, to-night. This is no place for me any longer. I must go away."

"It is no place for any of us," said Marjory, instinctively adopting him into the number of those who belonged to her. They were so few now.

But he took no advantage of this inference. He took it for granted, simply as she did. Perhaps he pressed her hand a little closer to his side; but if so, the action was involuntary.

"No," he said, "it is no place for you. This piece of impertinence to-night—"

"I never thought of it," said Marjory; "it was nothing; that could not make any difference; but we must go."

"It is selfish of me to say anything," he said; "but it is I who must go first—not the same man who came here a month ago, Miss Heriot; just a month—though it might be an hour, or it might be a year. It has separated my life into two pieces. May I write to you after I have managed to take myself away?"

"Surely," she said, in her gentlest tone.

"And will you write to me? I have no right to ask it; but you are—different, somehow. You know

how little I am good for. I don't mean to make any professions to you now—to say you have made me better. Perhaps I am past making better. I should like to try, first; but if you would write now and then, just three words—"

"Certainly I will write," she said, looking frankly in his face. "How much you have been to us all this terrible time! Do you think I can ever forget it? And it is not only that we owe you a day in harvest—as we Scotch folk say—but people cannot feel with each other as we have done, and then cease and forget each other. Certainly I will write; it will be one of my pleasures."

He held her hand tight in his arm; his heart was beating vaguely with many half-formed impulses. But even if anything like love had been ripe in him, it would have seemed profanation at that moment. He only held her hand closer to his side where his heart was stirring so strangely, and said—

"You make me almost happy—if it was possible to be happy in going away. I suppose I shall never come back—absolutely back here, to Pitcomlie; but we shall see each other? It is not a parting, this—only for the moment? say you think so, to cheer me."

"I hope so!" she said. She was franker, more open than he was; but she was much less agitated. It was to her an easy thing to believe in this future meeting, because she wished for it without any passionate desire. But he longed for assurance, and doubted even while he affirmed; for it seemed

to him as if his whole future was dark and uncertain till that moment should come.

"How good it is to hear you say so!" he said. "If you hope for it, it will come to pass. I have not so much faith in my own prayers."

"Alas! the things I have hoped for have not come to pass," she said, with a little outburst of sorrow. And then, when her brief fit of weeping was over (he would have liked so to have taken her into his arms, to have had her sob on his breast—but dared not), she looked up to him again with a faint smile. "I have got so used to cry and show you all my weakness," she said; "how I shall miss you! It is luxury to have some one by who will not be impatient of one's tears."

This, however, was getting too much for poor Fanshawe; his heart was melting in his breast. It was all he could do to keep from some foolish demonstration or other. He had put his other hand on hers where it lay on his arm; he bent over her, stooping his head towards her—almost carried away by the tide of emotion in him. He felt that to save himself, and to save the sanctity of this last meeting, he must fly as long as he was able.

"May I say good-bye to you here?" he said, trembling; "I must go to-morrow. You will write to me about everything? about Milly, and Mr. Charles—and the book—and about Isabell, if you find out anything more; but chiefly, and above all, about yourself—you promise? Then good-bye, and God bless you; you will say the same to me?"

"God bless you!" she said, moved by his emo-

tion, looking at him with tears still in her eyes; "God bless you, dear friend, and good-bye."

He stood a moment irresolute, hanging over her; holding both her hands — not knowing very well what he did. If there had been light enough to show his face, they never could have parted so. But he knew he was not seen, and felt as if he had concealed his feelings. At that last moment he stooped suddenly, and kissed her hair just where it was parted; and then dropped her hands and disappeared—she could not tell where.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE day after a great event is, in all kinds of circumstances, a difficult one. The remains of great excitement, not yet quite spent, make the air heavy, and produce innumerable little explosions like half-exhausted fireworks. Common life is feeble, and fills with lassitude people who have been living at high pressure; and the mixture of weariness, oppression, and lingering excitement is hostile to every attempt at settling down. This was the state of the atmosphere at Pitcomlie after the long strain was over, after the shutters were opened, the blinds drawn up, and ordinary existence had re-commenced. And besides this inevitable and feverish dullness, there was all the excitement of half completed events to intensify the painfulness of the pause. The former inhabitants of the house did not know what step to take first; the new possessors were equally doubtful. Neither liked to make the first movement. They avoided each other, yet were compelled to meet.

Mr. Charles spent the morning in his room, pondering over the situation with many troublous thoughts. To tear himself away from this familiar place was painful to him; but that was not all. To leave the home of his fathers in the hands of these

two young women, who were altogether strangers to the race, was more painful still. The one, he said to himself, was a selfish fool, utterly incapable of comprehending the interests of the young heir, or of adapting herself to the life that was best for him; the other Mr. Charles had not been able to fathom. He thought her a sensible sort of girl, that might keep her sister out of mischief. He had put all his beloved papers in order, feeling that his work might be interrupted; but these very papers belonged to the house of Pitcomlie; he could not take them away with him any more than he could take the old walls. What was he to do? His work would come to an end—the occupation of his life. He would have to go and seek a new home at his age —find a new refuge for all those accumulations of art which it was so pleasant for him to think he had added to the attractions of the old house. He sat down, and sighed over them at one moment, feeling the change impossible; and then he would rise, stimulated by some recollection of last night, and push the engravings together into their portfolios, and hunt for the covers of the cases in which his curiosities were set forth. Where could he take them to? His own house in George Square certainly was ready for their reception and his, but the idea did not attract him. He was not fond of his own house. It had no associations, no recollections except those of a dreary week now and then which he had spent in it alone. Mr. Charles was a born old bachelor, but he was as little used to being alone as any paterfamilias. His brother's children

had been brought up at his feet, he had possessed the delightful privilege of interfering with their education, laying down laws for them, finding fault with them, interfering and commenting, without any responsibility. No privilege could have been more delightful to him than this; and when he had now and then returned for a few days to his own house, he had been, as it were, a banished man. To be sure if he went to his own house now, he could take the only remaining children of the family with him, and make a home for himself by their means; but this brought in the element of responsibility which he feared, and of which up to this moment he had kept clear. No wonder that Mr. Charles closed his portfolios hurriedly, and sat down in his chair with a sigh. If only any means could be thought of, any device fallen upon, for compromising the matter, and keeping things as they were.

Marjory, strangely enough, was infinitely less sensitive. Though she had no other home, and had never contemplated another — though it was impossible to her to realize the fact that she was no longer mistress of Pitcomlie, yet the possibility of change affected her much less strongly. Her whole being seemed to be dulled and slower of perception. She sent away the servants who came to her as usual for orders, and felt no pain. She even arranged her books and her papers for going away, without any sharp sense of the hardship of leaving her home. She had no particular feeling of any kind. Life seemed to be running low in her, and sometimes grief plucked at her heart; but for

other emotions, she did not seem to have any. The thing she felt most was, that she missed something. What was it? Something she had been used to had slid from her. There was a vague want which she could not, and perhaps did not, wish to identify. Fanshawe had gone away that morning. She had been moved by his leave-taking, almost more than she thought seemly in her circumstances. She had a strong feeling of what was fit and natural, and the curious vague excitement with which his last looks and words filled her, seemed strangely out of place, and even wrong. She repressed the feeling with a strong hand; but she did not suspect that the blank sense of inability to feel anything which had crept over her could be connected with that repression in any way. She was dull, dull to the depths of her heart and to the tips of her fingers. Nothing seemed to affect her. As for the little vexations of the household, the transference of her powers, these moved her no more than pin-pricks. She was quite ready to have gone away, and would not have felt it. When she was called downstairs by an intimation that Miss Jean was seen coming up to the great door to visit the family, she obeyed the call without any particular sentiment. Matilda and her sister were both in the drawing-room when Marjory went in, and Miss Jean, leaning upon her cane, in her new "blacks," to which she had added another fold of crape for each new death, was standing in the middle of the room, looking at them. Matilda had not budged from her sofa. She had nodded, and said, "How d'ye do?

Give the lady a chair, Fleming," without further disturbing herself; and it was these words that Aunt Jean was slowly repeating when Marjory went in.

"Give the leddy a chair, Fleming!" she said; "that's a kind and a pleasant welcome for one that was born in the house, and knows everything and every person in it. Perhaps, Fleming, as, no doubt, you're informed on the subject, you will let me know who this young lady may be?"

"It's Mrs. Chairles, mem," said Fleming, solemn as a judge.

"Ah! poor thing; I understand," said Miss Jean; "brought up in India! that explains much. But, Mistress Chairles, if you'll allow your husband's grand-aunt to say it, young women in this country get up off their seats when they're visited by any person worthy of respect. I am twice your age, and I'm Thomas Heriot, your father-in-law's, aunt."

"Tell her how delicate I am; I am not allowed to talk much," said Mrs. Charles, addressing her sister. "And I am in great trouble," she continued in her own person; "and very much tried, and too unwell to do anything. Pray take a seat. Marjory will be here directly. I suppose she is the person you want?"

"I came to see an afflicted family," said Miss Jean, solemnly. "Most people think it necessary to say they're sorry when there's been death in a family. Oh! you are here, Marjory! Mistress Chairles tells me it's you I want. I wanted the whole family—

that was my intention; but if you're all as easy in your mind, and stand as little in need of comfort as she does, I'll have my coming for my going, and I might have stayed at home."

"I am very glad to see you, Aunt Jean," said Marjory; and struck with the unchangeable look of the old face, which altered not, whatever altered, a sudden *accès* of tears came to her. "It seems to be years ago," she said, faltering; "but you never change."

"No, I never change," said the old woman, with a tremble in her voice. The words very nearly overset her composure, steady as she was in the calm of her old age; for Aunt Jean, too, had human feelings—and a still older generation, further off than the father of this house, who had been so lately carried out of it, sprang out of all the shadows as Marjory spoke, and came and stood about the old, old human creature who had once been young.

"I'll sit down," she added, hastily. "I'm old and no strong, though I never change. That was a hard word to say. I mind changes enough in myself, more than you have ever known; from young to old, Marjory Hay-Heriot; from a bonnie young thing, as bonnie as you are at your best, to an old witch like what you see me. I hope that's change enough; but you think I should change away out of the world, and let younger folk take my place and bide? Well, maybe so do I; but one way or another, it's not in our hands."

"I did not mean anything unkind, Aunt Jean."

"Well, you might have meant that, and no harm done," said the old woman; "and you may cry, it's natural; but you need not forget your manners. Introduce these young leddies that do not know me. The one on the sofa is Mistress Chairles. Ay, I know that; but she does not know me."

"Oh, yes; indeed I do, thanks," said Matilda. "Excuse my getting up. I knew whenever you came in, that you must be poor Charlie's old aunt."

"That shows how civil he must have been in his descriptions, and what it is to be well-bred," said Miss Jean.

"And this," said Marjory, hastily interrupting her, to stop some farther interchange of courtesies, "is Miss Bassett, Mrs. Charles's sister."

Verna came forward with a curtsey of deep deference.

"I hope you will forgive my sister," she said; "she is very much fatigued with her journey, and all she has had to bear since. It is not very long, not three months, since her baby was born; and with all her trials—"

Miss Jean looked somewhat contemptuously towards the sofa, and then she said, abruptly,

"Where's your Uncle Chairles? He's a born haverel, but he's a man, and, therefore, trusted. Send for him, that I may hear his mind. I've not come this long way for nothing, and I want to know what you are all going to do."

Marjory rang the bell. She did not even understand the look with which Mrs. Charles from the

sofa watched her. When she was about to give her orders, however, Matilda interrupted her.

"You can give Mr. Heriot my compliments," she said, addressing Fleming, "and say that his aunt is here, and that I wish him to come, please. I beg your pardon, Marjory; I prefer to give him all the orders myself. If I don't, he never will get used to me; and Charlie used to say I was always too humble, letting everybody get the better of me. I should not have said Mr. Heriot, though. Fancy, Verna! it is little Tommy that is Mr. Heriot, and his old uncle is only Mr. Charles. What fun it is!"

Miss Jean looked on with keen eyes. If Marjory had shown any signs of discomfiture, probably she would have enjoyed it; for she too, in her antediluvian experience, she who had once been the Laird of Pitcomlie's daughter, and dethroned by a sister-in-law, could recall some scenes very similar, which had driven her nearly frantic with rage. But Marjory was still so dull and dead, that this incident scarcely affected her. A slight smile came upon her face when Matilda stopped her, and she drew a chair beside her visitor without making any remark. Miss Jean, however, made a great many remarks. Her keen eyes travelled about the room, from one corner to another, noticing everything in the new arrangements which had already crept in; the displacing of a chair, the sofa drawn forward. She was not very familiar with the Pitcomlie drawing-room, and yet she recognised the changes with her keen eyes.

"That used to be your favourite place?" she

said, pointing to the spot where Mrs. Charles's sofa had replaced Marjory's chair.

"Yes, I liked the window," said Marjory, making the best of it.

"And it was there you used to have your work?"

"Yes, Aunt Jean—but—"

"And that's the bow-window Thomas Heriot was so foolish as to make, poor shortsighted haverel of a man, for his bonnie May?"

"Oh, Aunty, yes! I have had the good of it so long—but if I had never enjoyed it at all," cried Marjory with tears, "I should be glad to think he had done it—for me!"

"Ay, ay," said the old woman, "that's how the world goes. For his bonnie May! I tell ye there were things once done like that for a bonnie Jean — that has not been bonnie this many, many a day — and the strangers get the good of them. That's how the world goes."

"What are they talking about?" said Matilda to Verna. "What an old witch she looks! I know she means to be disagreeable. But don't you think I shall give in, not for all the Heriots in the world. I am not going to be interfered with by sisters, or aunts, or any other kind of relations. I mean to be mistress in my own house."

"And of course you will do it your own silly way," said Verna. "When you have the whole house by the ears, don't ask me to come in and help you, that is all. I never saw anyone so hard-hearted, so silly, so cruel—"

"Oh, I like that," said Matilda, with a fool's invincible barbarity. "If I were as cruel as you call me, how long would it be before I sent you back?"

Mr. Charles came into the room at this moment, moody and absent, still full of his own thoughts. His chimney-corner was covered with an old red Indian shawl. Matilda had tried that too this morning, and found it a comfortable seat, though rather too warm for the season. "In Winter it will be charming," she had said, and left her shawl, her air-cushion, and her footstool, by way of showing her appropriation of the place. Somehow that flag of the invader caught Mr. Charles's eye even when he drew his chair into the middle of the room, and greeted Aunt Jean with the seriousness which was appropriate to a visit of condolence. "You see us in sad circumstances, very sad circumstances," he said.

"Some of you bear up wonderfully considering all things," said Miss Jean, "though perhaps not this girrl here, who is a perfect shadow. A funeral visit's a dreary thing, Chairlie Heriot, and I did not come just to condole. I had a good enough guess how things would be, having gone through it myself; and I came to ask what were your plans, and what was to be done with Marjory? I suppose she does not mean to stay here."

"Say something, Matty," whispered Verna, shaking her sister, "for your own sake don't be quite a wretch—say something! Ask her to stay."

"We have come to no resolution," said Mr. Charles blankly. He could not look round to make an appeal to the new mistress of the house, but he raised his voice in his weakness that she might hear him. "We have come to no resolution. I'm very fond of my old tower, and so is Marjory of her father's house."

"Say something, Matty, for heaven's sake," again said Verna behind backs. "It is a large house—ask them to stay."

"I am sure," said Matilda after a pause, "I don't wish anyone to hurry. If Marjory will promise not to interfere with the servants, or the things—or give orders, or ring the bell for Fleming when she pleases—she may stay if she likes. Only I know dear Charlie would have wished me to be mistress in my own house."

Mr. Charles had sprung nervously to his feet. "Not another day!" he said hastily; but then sat down again with that blank irresolute air. Where was he to take her? and then the responsibility, and his old tower that he loved!

"You're a very considerate young woman," said Miss Jean grimly, with a fierce little chuckling laugh. "You'll be much respectit in the county, and much thought of by the Heriots' auld friends. That I'll assure you of—indeed I'll see to it myself."

"Oh, thanks," said Matilda, with a certain alarm, for it was evident even to her obtuse understanding that more was meant than met the ear.

"I'll see to that myself," the old woman repeated with a chuckle. "And in the meantime, Marjory,

go you and get your things, and bring the bairn, and come away home with me. Comlie High Street is no amiss for a born and bred Heriot; everybody in Fife knows you, and what you are, and how you come there, which is more than can be said for everybody. Come away, my bonny woman; and as for you, Chairlie Heriot, you can do what you please; stay on till they turn you out, or till you've gathered up all your playthings, your pictures and your papers, and the whole paraphernalia. But in the meantime I'll no see my flesh and blood putting up with the slights of a strange woman. Marjory and the bairn shall come with me."

Mr. Charles was wounded in his tenderest feelings, but still he saw a certain consolation and relief in this suddenly propounded plan, which would save him from so many difficulties.

"I would not say but it was the best thing that could be done," he said, slowly. "Anyhow, May, my dear, it would leave us time to think."

"I had thought of it," said Marjory. "I knew Aunt Jean would take us in. It is the best refuge for us. I shall be glad to go away, and yet not to go away. If you think we will not be a trouble to you—"

"Na, na; no trouble, no trouble. In a whilie," said the old woman, with moisture in her keen eyes, "it will all be yours, my old house and my pickle siller. It's a great thing to have natural heirs. You're too natural, Marjory, too natural. You've smiled the lads away from you with scornings and civil speeches, as I did myself. You'll be Miss

Heriot, like me. It's suited me well enough, but yet I'm wae to see another begin. For life's long, and sometimes it's weary and dreary. There's more trouble the other way, but even trouble is a divert, and keeps you from that weary think-thinking, and all about yourself."

"But you've no warrant, Aunt Jean—no warrant," said Mr. Charles, with great impatience, "for saying that Marjory will be an old maid, like you."

"An old maid!" said Miss Jean, hastily; "she's an old maid already; she's five-and-twenty; that's the age that makes an old maid—and not five-and-seventy, which is my amiable time of life. But I'm no one to give nicknames, or I would be sore tempted to say that you were an old maid yourself, Charlie Heriot, with all your pernickety ways. You were never a lad of mettle, even in your best days; but you'll get no rest for your long legs here, ye may take my word for it. In the meantime, ye can give me your arm to the door, where I'll wait for Marjory. Good morning to ye, leddies; you're very civil and polite to the family, and I'll not fail to make it known."

"Oh, what an old witch!" said Matilda, as Miss Jean marched out with her cane tapping more briskly than usual upon the floor. "I suppose she wanted to come too, and live upon Tommy's money, like all the rest; but he has got a mother to take care of him, the precious darling!"

"Oh, Matty, for heaven's sake—don't be such a fool!"

"You're frightened of the witch," cried Matilda, with a laugh; "as if she could do us either good or harm."

"No good, you may be sure!" said Verna, walking to the window with disturbed looks. Miss Jean's old carriage stood at some little distance from the door, and she herself walked up and down in front of the house with her cane, leaning on Mr Charles's arm. Fleming stood on the steps, taking his part in the conversation. "A bonnie-like mistress for the old house!" she was saying, with scorn in her keen black eyes.

"Ye may say that, Miss Jean!" said old Fleming, shaking his head.

Verna did not understand what was the meaning of so strange an expression. "Bonnie" sounded like admiration, and Matilda certainly was pretty; but there was little admiration in the tone. Her watch was interrupted by the entrance of Marjory to take leave. Milly was clinging by her sister's side as usual, holding out her little hand with a certain defiance; and even Matilda faltered out a half-apology, and raised herself from her sofa to say good-bye.

"I hope it isn't for what I said about the servants, Marjory. Of course, I didn't mean to vex you; but you know yourself, unless a change is made at once, it is never made; and dear Charlie was so set upon it that I should be mistress of my own house."

"You are quite right, and I am not vexed;" said Marjory, with a smile; and it was thus hurriedly,

without any more leave-taking, before the weeping maids had time to gather from all the corners, to take leave of her, that she left, as she thought for ever, her father's house.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"Go away, go away, you taupies!" said Fleming; "go away to your wark; what's the use o' a wheen women, girnin' and greetin' about the place? It's a' I can to do to keep things gaun, saftly and steadily, for the credit of the house, so long as my time lasts —without distraction from you."

"Whar's Miss Marjory?" said the housemaid. "If you think it's you we're wanting you're far mistaken. Maister Fleming, it was ill done of you to let her go away, and never to say a word. Eh, what changes in this house since I came here! I've been here ten year come the term—"

"And me mair than that!" said Beenie, who was kitchenmaid under Mrs. Simpson, and nearly as good a cook as her superior. "I mind her when she was a bit lassie, and me no much mair myself. If any have reason to be down-hearted about the family it's me, that am the longest here, except Mr. Fleming. Eh! but I'm wae no' to have seen the last of her—as I've seen the last o' a' the rest."

"For guidsake, woman, dinna speak as if Miss Marjory was dead like the rest!" cried another. They all stood round the door, gazing out after the rumbling old carriage as it jolted along the drive. Mr. Charles had turned from the door, and was visible in the distance, making towards the side

entrance into his beloved refuge. Marjory's maid set up a dismal cry at the sight of the departing vehicle. "Oh, my young leddy! my bonny young leddy!" she cried. "I'm no so auld as some of you, but that's no my fault; and I've seen mair of Miss Marjory than the whole of you put together. Eh! will I never see her mair? will she never come back to this dreary house? We may get as good places, but there will never be the like of her in Pitcomlie again."

"Haud you your tongue, my woman!" said Fleming, patting her on the shoulder. "If Miss Marjory had thought as much of you as you do of her, she would have taken you with her. She's no that ill left but what she can keep her maid like any other leddy. Haud a' your tongues—"

"What's a' this, Sirrs?" said Mrs. Simpson, suddenly appearing on the field. "Miss Marjory? If Miss Marjory was gane twenty times o'er, is that a reason for neglecting the wark? Wark maun be done, whoever goes or stays. Death itself makes little difference. Mr. Fleming, it's no what I expected of you, to encourage those taupies in their idleness. Go away to your wark, go away every one of you. I'll speak to Miss Marjory—Lord bless us! I'll never mind that Miss Marjory's nae longer the mistress here. Now thae woman are gane, I'm free to say that it makes a great difference to the place, Mr. Fleming. I've nothing to say against English leddies; there are ower many of them in the country-side for the like of us to find fault; but Mistress Chairles is no to my taste—she's no to my

taste. I've learnt what it was to have leddies over me that were grand at understanding, and I canna' put up with a whippersnapper like that."

Fleming nodded his head in assent; he nodded so often that one of the young maid-servants, lurking at a distance, had nearly betrayed herself by laughter; but there was no merriment in his mind. "You're in the right of it there!" was all he said.

"It may be rather early to make up your mind what to do," said Mrs. Simpson; "and especially me as I have a kind of dependence upon Mr. Chairles, that was the one, ye maybe ken that brought me here—"

"I'm leaving at the term," said Fleming shortly.

"At the term?"

"Just that! I have sixpence here and sixpence there, laid out to advantage. A man canna hear so much gude solid conversation as I've heard at Pitcomlie table, without having his wits shairpened. I'm no wanting to set up myself as mair clever than ordinary; but it's weel invested, weel invested. It would be a sin against my many mercies if I did not acknowledge as much."

"No doubt, no doubt!" said Mrs. Simpson, dazzled by this intimation, and respectfully interested, as most people are in confidences respecting money; "you're so weel kent for a sensible man, that I can easy believe that."

"Yes, it's weel invested," said Fleming. "I'm no one to brag, but I've had opportunities mair than most men can boast of, and I hope I've profited. A nice quiet business now, either in the public line,

or a general merchant's, might be very suitable to a man like me—that has studied mankind a wee, and knows the world; but there's mair than a man wanted for setting up—there's the wife."

"Oh, ay, nae doubt ye'll be thinking of a wife!" said Mrs. Simpson, veiling under a smile of rustic raillery the palpitation of her matronly bosom at this address. There is something in the aspect of a man who has intentions, which betrays itself at once to the accustomed eye. Mrs. Simpson recognized it by instinct, and she made violent efforts to regain the utter unconsciousness which is the wisest attitude to be maintained in such a case by every woman who respects herself. "You'll no be long a wanter when you have sic a story to tell," she said; "and nae doot ye have some bonnie lass in your eye."

"Weel!" said Fleming, with that indescribable air of subdued yet triumphant vanity which no woman ever mistakes, "maybe no just a lass; nor maybe what you would call bonnie to them that looks but skin-deep; but a real, honest, decent woman that knows the world—and that's better. I'm no just to call young nor bonnie mysel'; and if I maun speak the truth, as is aye best, it's just you, my woman—nobody but you."

"Me! the man's gane gyte!" said Mrs. Simpson, with admirable surprise. She took him in from head to foot with one glance of her eye, and put him into a mental balance, and weighed him in the course of one moment. He was not young—nor yet bonnie; certainly not bonnie she allowed to her-

self; but yet there was something to be said on his side of the question.

"Na, no me," said the old butler. "I'm but showing my sense. There's many a braw lad of my years, with guid prospects, excellent prospects, and nae incumbrances, that would please his e'e with some bit gilflirt o' twenty, raither than satisfy his mind as I'm doing. Therefore, Betty Simpson, my woman, if you've naething to say against it, there's my hand, I'll ne'er beguile ye. As for the bairns, as there's but two, and them grown up, I'll look over the bairns."

"Lord bless the man, his head's clean turned," cried Mrs. Simpson. "Look over the bairns! They're nae sin that I should be excused for them. Na, na. Naebody that's no proud to have them—a callant that's a credit to a' belonging to him, and as trig a lass of sixteen as ever steppit, and extraordinary clever with her hands for her age—"

"I tell you I'll look over them," said Fleming. "I've nae incumbrances mysel; but since they're there, and canna be made away wi', I'll put up with them, my woman. Ye may take me or ye may leave me. I'm no forcing ye one way or the other; but here I am, no an ill man, though I say it that shouldna, and you'll be a great fuil if ye dinna close the bargain. That's a' I've got to say."

"Ye're but an auld haverel yourself to talk any such nonsense," said the housekeeper, beginning to melt. "But if I could be sure ye meant a' ye say——"

"A', and mair, my deary," said Fleming, ad-

vancing with antiquated gallantry. "But it's no the time nor the season," he continued, making a pause. "I'll gi'e ye what proof ye like at a mair convenient moment. A', and mair."

"If ye werena such an auld whillie-wha—" said the housekeeper; but she finally withdrew, with a promise to turn it over in her mind. Fleming was not tortured by any serious anxiety. He nodded his head when he was left by himself with a satisfied smile. "That's done!" he said to himself decisively, and prepared to carry in the tray for the afternoon tea, with sentiments of genial placidity and benevolence. These amiable feelings, however, were doomed to be soon ruffled.

"Bring it here," said Matilda, impetuously; "do you think I am going to get up off my chair to go to the other end of the room? Wheel that table up to the sofa and place it here."

"The table will have to go back again, I'm thinking, Mistress Chairles, when you're done," said Fleming. "It's one that belongs to auld Mr. Charles Heriot, no to the house."

"Hold your tongue, Sir; I was not consulting you," cried Matilda. "I never heard a servant venture to talk so. You will please to recollect, that sort of thing might do with Miss Heriot, but it will not do with me. She might put up with it, but I shan't. If you cannot be quiet and respectful, you had better make up your mind to go at once."

"I'll do that, Mistress Chairles," said Fleming. "You and me will never 'gree, I see weel. I've

settled to leave at the term; but if it's mair agreeable to you to gie me board wages and so forth——"

"What do you mean by the terrm, as you call it?" said Matilda, beginning to quake.

"It's an awful pity when leddies do not understand the language o' the country they're living in," said Fleming, drily. "The term is Whitsunday, Mistress Chairles, if you ken that. If no, I'll bring ye the date when I've lookit it up in the Almanack."

"Leave the room, Sir, and go as soon as possible," cried Matilda, in wrath. It cannot be denied that the old butler of Pitcomlie was trying as a servant to unaccustomed nerves and tempers. He drew the table she had indicated, which was a heavy one, inlaid with marble, one of Mr. Charles's curiosities, with much trouble to the side of the sofa, and arranged the tray very deliberately upon it. Then he walked slowly to the fire and made it up, and for five minutes kept pottering about the room, putting invisible trifles in order, and wearing Matilda's temper to a fierce and fine edge. "Oh, for heaven's sake, go away!" she cried, "and leave the house, you horrid impertinent—— Miss Marjory might put up with you, but I shan't. Send Mr. Charles Heriot to me directly. Go and call him directly, do you hear, Sir? Will you go, or must I go myself?" cried the impatient young woman, jumping up from her sofa. Ring the bell, Verna, ring the bell instantly! send for the old gentleman. I suppose there are other servants in the house?"

"Oh, ay, Mrs. Chairles, plenty of servants," said Fleming, making his exit in a leisurely way, while

the bell pealed through the house, rousing all the maids.

"She's fainted or something," cried Mrs. Simpson. "She's just the kind o' person to faint. Run you, Jenny, and get the English maid; and some of ye flee with cauld water—and I'll burn some feathers and come after ye myself."

"What's the matter—what's the matter?" said Mr. Charles, stumbling through the women, who had crowded towards the drawing-room door, in the pleasureable excitement of such an occurrence.

"It's Mrs. Chairles that's fainted. It's the young leddy," they all murmured in tones of interest. Matilda, however, herself met him, furious, on the threshold.

"Am I to have nothing but impudence?" she cried, "and people laughing at me, and—and paying no attention to whatever I say? Is this my house or is it not? I will not put up with it. I will pack them all out of the house one after another. I will give them no characters; I will—— Oh, you are all a set of barbarians!" cried Matilda, bursting into tears. "Oh, if poor dear Charlie had been here, he would never, never have allowed me to be used like this. And you—do you call yourself a gentleman, and let them all insult me? Or perhaps you told them to do it, because it is me, and not your niece that you are so fond of. Oh, Verna, come and help me! Oh, isn't there anybody? No man that is a gentleman would stand and gape, and see me treated so!"

Mr. Charles did gape, there is no doubt. He

was filled with the profoundest consternation. In all his experience, such a thing had never happened before. He did not understand the kind of creature thus sobbing, raging, insulting everybody around her. He made a gulp to swallow down his amazement, and waved his hand to the assembled servants.

"Go away, go away," he said. "Whisht—never mind—go away like good creatures, like kind creatures. You see it's a mistake, and you're not wanted. Mrs. Simpson, my good woman, there's no need for your feathers and your salts. Take them all away. There's nothing wanted—nothing wanted," Mr. Charles repeated, closing the door upon the assistants.

It was rather terrible to confront the heroine of the scene himself; but he had all a Scotchman's terror of "exposure," and shame of excitement, and loud voices At this moment, too, when the family was in such trouble! Mr. Charles looked pale and limp as he closed the door behind him, and faced, trembling, the clamouring newcomer, who made such claims upon him. He kept his eye upon her, as he might have done upon some unknown wild animal. And he cast a pitiful glance at Verna, who sat dumb in his own particular corner—a fact which he did not omit to note—working, as Mr. Charles described it afterwards, "at some ridiculous woman's work or other, and paying no more attention than if it was not her concern."

"Whisht, whisht!" said Mr. Charles; "don't cry! It cannot be so bad as you think. If anybody has

done anything to disturb you, of course we'll put it all right—we'll put it all right; don't cry. Tell me what's happened, and no doubt we'll be able to put it all right."

"Oh! how can you ask me what's happened—everything's happened!" cried Matilda. "There is not a servant in the house that does not insult us. They say disagreeable things to Elvin; they hate the poor Ayah, though I don't mind that so much, for I want an opportunity to send her away. I am sure they pinch poor Tommy when they have a chance, for the child's arms are black and blue. And as for me!" cried Matilda, rising into renewed excitement; "it's all because they think we're interlopers, and because the other Heriots, the old family, have gone and twisted their minds. They think no more of me than if I was the dust below the feet of that Marjory. Marjory, indeed! an old maid, as that old witch said, that never had any right to be mistress—that was never anything but the old gentleman's daughter—"

"Hem—ahem!" Mr. Charles made a great sound of coughing; it was the only thing he could do to drown all this, and to keep himself from getting angry. ("I was very near getting into a passion," he said afterwards; "I was very near speaking sharp, as I would have been sorry to have spoken.") To prevent this, he coughed so much that Matilda's voice was drowned, and his own angry feelings cooled down.

"You will excuse my cough. I have got cold, it appears," he said, pleased with his own skill in

having devised this expedient; and then, when a momentary pause had been obtained, he added, "We'll not discuss Marjory, if you please. The servants here have been good kind of creatures; faithful and honest, so far as I've seen. You must excuse them if they feel the change. Some of them have been long here, and are used to—to the old family, as you say. But if there's been any real insult, any disrespect, no doubt you have a right to my services; I cannot think, however, that any one in this house has been guilty of that. Miss Bassett—"

"Oh, don't ask anything of me," said Verna, turning her back. "She chooses to manage her own affairs herself. I don't mean to interfere."

"Oh! you wicked, cruel girl!" cried Matilda, throwing herself, sobbing, on the sofa. "Oh! why was I spared from the voyage, or from my confinement—the one coming so close on the other? Why was I made to live after my poor Charlie—my Charlie, that never would let any one worry me? If he were here, none of you would dare—you would all be trying which could be kindest—you would, every one! Oh! what shall I ever do in this hard-hearted place? Why didn't you take me and leave me with Charlie, and be done with it, rather than kill me an inch at a time, as you are doing now?"

Mr. Charles walked about the room in confusion and dismay, and heard a great deal more of this, before he could get free to inquire into the real causes of the fray. When he escaped at last, the confusion of his mind was such that he stepped

into the middle of Fleming's tray full of glasses for dinner, and broke several before he could pull himself up. When the further perturbation and excitement consequent upon this crash had been dispelled, and the pieces of broken glass carefully picked up and disposed of, Mr. Charles, still tremulous, swallowed a glass of sherry, and opened his mind to the old retainer of the house.

"Fleming," he said, "we've had a great and blessed dispensation in our ladies, in this house. They've been free of the follies of their kind in a way that's quite extraordinary to think of. But we must not expect that we're always to be so fortunate, or that Providence has just singled us out, you know, for special favour. We must try and put up with what's sent, and do our duty to the best of our ability—"

"'Deed, Mr. Chairles," said Fleming, "I have nae doubt it's real important to you to be able to take that comfort to yoursel', being one of the family, and in a manner bound to do your best; but as for me, I'm but a servant. I've served my forty year, which is long enough to gi'e me the best of characters in ony place; and I've saved a pickle siller, and invested it—by your advice, Sir, and that of ithers—in a very advantageous manner; and if I'm ever to mairry a wife, and hae a fireside of my ain, I have nae time to lose. I'm no saying but what you'll make a great hand o't, and carry the leddies through and break them in; but for me at my age to stand yon bit creature's temper and her ignorance, and haud my tongue and clip my words

to please her—by George! it's what I'll no do! And when I'm driven to sweer, Mr. Chairles—"

"And, by George! I'll not do it either!" said Mr. Charles, smiting his lean thigh. He was so roused up and stimulated by this valiant resolution, that he took another glass of sherry on the spot, a thing he had not been known to do for years. "I wish ye joy of the wife, &c.," he said. "I'll not follow your example in that; but why I should make myself miserable and ridiculous, for an idiot of a strange woman, at my time of life! By George! I'll not do it, any more than you!"

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

MAY.

BY

MRS. OLIPHANT,

AUTHOR OF

"THE MINISTER'S WIFE," ETC.

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BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1873.

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MAY.

CHAPTER I.

Marjory, as may be supposed, heard nothing of the tragi-comic commotion which she had left behind her. Her drive in the old carriage, the sight of many familiar things and places for the first time, after so much had passed which had separated her from her old world, roused her half painfully, half pleasantly. Every corner of the peaceful road, every cottage on the way, made its separate stab at her; so many remembrances which had fallen dormant in her mind, remembrances of "the boys," which from sheer familiarity and easiness of recollection had fallen out of recollection, started up in new life before her. She seemed to hear the shouts of their school time, and to see them, not men but lads, in their innocence and foolishness, about every turning. This wounded her sore, and yet gave her a sort of happiness. It was not like the drear blank of disappearance, the superseding of them, and calm passing on of the unconcerned world, which had stupefied her mind. Thus the change did her good as people say; and perhaps the sight of Miss Jean did her good, and the harsh yet true kindness

which spoke so despotically and acted so gently. But when she was safely housed in the High Street, a great reaction set in. So long as daylight lasted, Marjory turned her wistful eyes along the line of the coast towards the east, where the mansion house of Pitcomlie stood out on its headland, with something of the feelings which moved her on her drive. She sat there and recalled stories of her youth, feats which "the boys" had done, hairbreadth escapes, old dead jokes of the past, pitifullest of recollections. All these came up and buzzed about her. She smiled and wondered to find herself amused by memories which ought, she felt, to have been anything but amusing. These realizations of the past were sharp and poignant in the pain of their sorrow; but at the same time they were sweet.

It was only when night fell, when the silence of the small house fell round her, when the few people about were all asleep, and the street, upon which her room looked out, was quiet as the grave, that the pleasure of these recollections failed. She got chilled in the mournful silence. It was a still night, and the sound from the sea came very softly upon her ear, like a cadence measured and gentle. All was very still in Miss Jean's maiden habitation. The two maids slept down stairs at a distance from the other rooms. They went to bed at ten o'clock, as indeed did the little town with very few exceptions. Looking out from her window, as Marjory did by habit, being used to look out every night upon the sea, she saw opposite to her, in place of the intermittent gleam of the lighthouse to which she was

accustomed, a steady glimmer in young Hepburn's window, which was opposite. That was the only sign of fellowship in all the shadowy silent little town, where there was a sense of the presence of others without any sign of friendliness from them. This light roused in Marjory a vague uneasiness in the midst of so many other heavy thoughts. What was it that it recalled to her? Some other kind of light, some other sympathy. She dropped the blind and went in, and sat down wearily. A stifling sense of loss and dreary vacancy came upon her.

All her life long Pitcomlie and its interests had been her first thought. She had become the mistress of the house at a very early age, when she was little more than a child; and through all her subsequent life this care and occupation was all to her that a man's purpose is to him, filling her mind and mixing itself with all her expectations. Marjory had never loved any man with that strong and personal affection which overcomes all hindrances; but she had been loved and wooed, and no doubt, but for this, might have married one of her suitors or another. She had not, however, found herself able—she had not "had time" to let such an idea seize hold upon her mind. It had seemed so impossible that Pitcomlie, her father, her uncle, her baby-sister, and in the earlier period of her incumbency, "the boys," could do without her. It was impossible, quite impossible, she had said, when any dawn of inclination seemed rising within her. Thus she set herself and her own life aside as a secondary thing, and gave herself up to duties which an ill-

ness or an accident might terminate at any moment, without help or warning, leaving her stranded high and dry upon the shore. Women are trained to make such sacrifices, and make them daily, with the reward of being smiled at as old maids a little later, by their juniors who have known no such bond of duty. Marjory was far beyond the possibility of feeling such a penalty. She was thinking nothing of the consequences, nor of what her future life should be. What she felt was that the use of her was over, that her duties were finally done, that Pitcomlie wanted her no more, nor anyone, nor any place; her work in the world seemed accomplished. She had no longer anything to do for her family whom she had served with loyal devotion for so long. She had been their servant, and yet in a certain sense their mistress; but the duties of both offices were over. She was cast adrift; look where she might, she saw in the blank world before her nothing more to be done, which in any way resembled the office she had filled all her life. The only charge remaining to her was Milly; but after all to superintend the education of a child is very different from the many and various occupations which belong to the guidance of a family, the regulation of all domestic affairs, the interests moral and material with which she had been accustomed to deal.

A general deprived of his command, a sailor with his ship taken from him, could not have been more at a loss than this young woman, suddenly deprived of the occupations which had given char-

acter and meaning to all her past existence. She sat down drearily in Miss Jean's best room, amid all the dark old furniture, leaning her elbows upon an old escritoire which had belonged to her great-grandfather, and fixing her eyes unaware upon a portrait of that great-grandfather's mother. All around her was old, shadowy, still. It seemed to her that she herself had glided into the midst of those shadows to take a permanent place among them. The long silent procession of ancestors and ancestresses seemed to take possession of her, to draw her, a silent follower into their silent train. The very house and room seemed to exercise a certain fascination over her. They seemed to put their veto upon all change, novelty, movement of every kind. The High Street of Comlie, grass-grown and silent, the monotonous continued cadence of the sea, the little round of occupations which were no occupations, the position of spectator, sometimes bitterly, always disapprovingly critical of everything that went on at the house she had once ruled—was this all that remained for Marjory Hay-Heriot at twenty-five, as it was all that had fallen to the lot of Jean Hay-Heriot, and of many a proud silent gentlewoman besides, who had lived and died so, and scorned to complain?

Perhaps a milder and meeker woman would have seen a point of duty still remaining, which Marjory did not recognise. I am aware that, especially in books, there are sisters who would have devoted themselves to the self-denying task of watching over the new household at Pitcomlie, guiding

the young widow in the way in which she should go, and helping to train up a new and worthy representative of the family in the person of little Tommy, the future Laird. This, however, was an aspect of the matter which did not occur to Marjory. The fact that these new people were Charlie's wife and connections, I am afraid, exercised a repelling rather than attractive effect upon her. Their existence seemed almost a wrong to Charlie. Marjory made haste to separate his memory, poor fellow, from that of the strangers who had come in by accident, as it were, and snatched the home of her fathers out of her hands. She was too proud to say a word of complaint, and too sensible not to recognize fully the right of the new-comers. Nay, she was even impartial enough to compel herself to understand how Matilda's impatience to take possession of her new rights might be justified. But the reason often recognizes what the heart does not admit; and to range herself on the side of Mrs. Charles was utterly impossible to Charlie's sister. The best thing she could now do was to forget Pitcomlie altogether, she said to herself. The worst thing, and unfortunately the most likely, was that she should become, like Miss Jean, the critic of Pitcomlie, half-consciously on the outlook for its follies, and judging it severely, perceiving all its mistakes, and scarcely sorry for them. Marjory, who was no model of womankind, felt within herself all the capability for doing this. She felt that it was possible to her, and shrank with dismay from the thoughts.

Thus her heart was sick with more than grief—

with the sense as of a heavy curtain which had fallen over her life, an ending put to all that was worthy of being called life in it. Her existence had stopped, but she continued. How many of us have felt this! and what poor expedients some are put to, to invent for themselves such excuses for living as may cheat the vacancy into some reasonable semblance! This cannot happen, fortunately, at twenty-five; but Marjory felt, as was natural, that twenty-five was a great age, and that she had outlived all the new openings, all the possibilities of youthful existence. Miss Hay-Heriot, of the High Street of Comlie, like her great-aunt Jean, and many great-aunts before that, with all the use died out of her, and nothing to do but live. If she had been brought up to it, Marjory thought to herself, she would have minded less; but what a strange and dismal contrast from the life she had been brought up to—the busy existence full of care which she had lived only a fortnight since, appealed to on every side, found fault with, looked up to, with so many disagreeable offices thrust upon her, and work which she would gladly have got rid of! Now she had got rid of all her work at a stroke, and the cares seemed happiness to her in comparison with the blank which their absence left.

When her thoughts came to this point, however, they changed with a sudden start and spring. For there was something she had to do which no one now would dream of interfering with. It was late by this time, the middle of the night in Comlie, where everybody was up by six o'clock, and Marjory

was half afraid to move about the old room, where every board creaked under her foot. But she opened her box, which was near her, and took from it poor Tom's little desk, in which she had found his bills and his useless treasures. From thence she took out the packet which she had made up so carefully with the list and calculations which had given her so much trouble, and which it had grieved her so much to think of explaining to her father. Her father had got off without hearing of them, without any posthumous stab from his dead son. The stab had gone into Marjory's breast to have the edge blunted, and there it remained. Surely, she thought, with some natural tears, some good angel had watched over him, to give him an easy dismissal out of this hard world. He had never known that Tom had deceived him; he had never known that Charlie had died. But some one must always pay the penalty for such exemptions. Marjory took out her own calculations in the middle of the night, in the stillness, among all the shadows, and looked at the list ruefully enough. There was nobody now but herself to do it. Tom's memory was nothing to the new possessors of Pitcomlie, to no one, indeed, except herself, and perhaps one other, one helpless creature, who was breaking her heart it might be, somewhere, with no right to mourn, no power to vindicate. It gave Marjory, however, a little shock to feel the vulgar aspect of this sole thing which it remained to her to do for the family. It put Isabell out of her mind, so potent is the force of a bit of harsh reality over all gentler thoughts.

To pay Tom's debts; that was what she had to do. She almost smiled by herself at the difference between her theoretical sense of high devotion to her own people, and the perfectly prosaic yet disagreeable form which that devotion must take. There was nothing lofty in it to swell her heart, or give her the elevating consciousness of a noble duty. It would only make her so much the poorer, abridge her capabilities, and perhaps procure for her some irritating and troublesome discussions with the "man of business," who would not understand the necessity. But still it had to be done. Marjory swept all the papers impatiently back, when this fact made itself apparent to her. She was more sick than ever of everything about her. I don't know if a little annoyance at the absolute loss of so much money had anything to do with this feeling. I doubt very much whether it had, for money was little more than a symbol to Marjory. But a certain whimsical sense of an anti-climax—of a mean necessity following a grand intention—crossed her mind, disposing her half to laugh, and half to cry. Yes, it seemed dismal beyond measure to have come to an end of all her duties, to have nothing now to do for her family, whose prime minister she had been all her life; but to be roused from the painful depression of that thought to a consciousness of still having Tom's debts to pay! This sordid claim upon her, enveloped in a cloud of petty misery, of meanness, and unworthiness, and shifts, and falsehood, what otherwise was the mournfullest tragedy. Marjory pushed all the papers away, almost throwing them

into the escritoire in the movement of her impatience —and went to bed. The most sensible thing to do, no doubt; but meaning an amount of provoked temper, annoyance, vexation, and half ludicrous despair, which we will not attempt to describe.

During the next week, the half of Fife drove into the High Street to leave cards and pay visits of condolence. Such of them as were received in Miss Jean's old-fashioned drawing-room, were edified with an account of the shortcomings of Mrs. Chairles which made it difficult for these ladies to maintain the gravity proper to the occasion. But as for Marjory, she had the cards for her share; Miss Jean concluded that for a young woman who had lost her father and two brothers in so short a space of time, to be able to see any one, was an idea which was almost indecent—not to say criminal. Miss Jean was strong on this point, though her social code was lax on others; she spoke of her niece in subdued tones, as of an invalid; she was, "poor thing, as well as you could expect—not able for much, but resigned, and trying to bear her trouble like a Christian woman." This was her old aunt's description of poor Marjory's half-stupefied, half-excited state, and of the superabundant life and energy which she felt within her. The old lady ordered her old carriage daily for a drive, which Marjory took with resignation, through the roads which were so familiar to her, where she seemed to know not only every turn, but every leaf upon every tree, and every blade of green corn which began to rise in the fields. After taking this exercise, which

was her duty, Marjory had to resign herself to remain indoors; her longing for the beach, where the measured rising and falling of the sea was soothing to her, was considered by Miss Jean an illegitimate craving not to be encouraged.

"It's all imagination, all imagination. What good could the sea do ye? Sit at the back window, and ye'll hear it, sometimes more than ye wish," she said, with a shiver, thinking of the stormy wintry nights.

Sometimes, however, Marjory was permitted to stray round the churchyard, and renew the flowers which, with a weakness which Miss Jean denounced, yet gave in to, she had placed upon the graves. She did this in the evening, when Comlie was beginning to close its windows, and few people saw her glide across the road in her black dress. On one of these occasions, however, Marjory found other people before her in the churchyard. Generally it was very quiet, the loneliest place, with its old sixteenth century monuments standing up around, guarding it from the approach of anything more novel. The two figures before her attracted little attention from her at first, till she perceived that the corner which attracted them was that which contained the Pitcomlie vault. They came back again and again to that spot, the man diverging now and then, the woman ever returning. When Marjory's attention was fully roused by this, it seemed to her that she recollected the woman's figure. She was of the middle size, of very ordinary dress and appearance, like a hundred others who

might have been met in Comlie High Street; but there was something in her outline and the little gestures she made as she called back her companion, which attracted Marjory's attention.

"Come back, John, come back; there is nothing I care for here but one thing," she said, leaning upon the very railing where Miss Heriot's own steps were bound. Marjory went up to her lightly and swiftly, and laid her hand on her shoulder. She turned round with a suppressed cry. It was the same young woman, round, ruddy, and commonplace, but with a serious look in her eyes which gave her a certain dignity, whom Marjory had spoken with at Pitcomlie the night before her father's funeral. The girl gave a visible start, changed colour, and called again, "Come back, John!" with an air of something like fright. Then she made an effort, and recovered command of herself. She made Marjory a slight curtsey, and confronted her steadily. "Were you wanting something with me, mem?" she said.

"I want to know what you have to do at my brother's grave?" said Marjory, breathless; "what you have to do with him? Won't you tell me? There is nothing I would not give to know. Oh! tell me! I do not blame you. I mean no harm of any kind; but I want to know."

"Wha said I had anything to do with either him or his grave?" said the young woman.

Her companion, attracted by the voices, drew near suddenly, and stood as if to stop further con-

versation between the two. The stranger gave one indifferent glance up at him, and then went on:

"I'll no pretend I don't know ye. You're Miss Heriot, and I'm but a poor lass; but I've a right to walk in a place like this, if I like—to read the gravestones, if I like."

"Oh, tell me!" said Marjory, too much excited to notice the air which her companion attempted to give to the discussion. "I mean no harm; tell me only who you are, and if you belong to Isabell."

"What does the lady know about Isabell?" asked the man, interrupting suddenly.

"Nothing but her name," said Marjory; "nothing but her name! and that she cared for my brother. I am not blaming her, or you. I mean no unkindness. I only want to know—to see her—to find out—"

"Miss Heriot," said the young woman, "you'll find out nothing with my will; you're naething to us, and we're naething that I ken of to you. If ever there was anything to tell, you would hear, like others. But dinna interfere with us. Poor folk have rights as well as their betters. I will answer nae questions, and neither shall any that belongs to me."

She turned away abruptly; but the man hesitated. He brought her back, plucking at her shawl.

"The lady means no harm," he said. "She says so; and if there's nothing to be ashamed of—"

"Oh, hold your tongue!" cried the girl, in a tone of exasperation. "It is me that has to judge, and I've made up my mind. Hold your peace,

man! You would believe whatever was told you with a soft voice and a pleasant look. She stands up for her ain, and we stand for ours. There's nae fellowship nor friendship between us. Good night to ye, mem; we'll disturb you no longer. Man! cannot you hold your tongue?"

"If there was just reason—" he said, still hesitating.

The young woman clutched at his arm, and turned him away almost violently. Marjory watched them with a tumult of feelings which she scarcely understood. It seemed to her strange that she, too, could not turn to some one—tell some one what had happened. But there was no one to tell; and for that matter, nothing had happened. She watched them as they withdrew hastily, driven away by her presence. She stood with her hand upon the rail that encircled the family vault, with all the tablets inscribed with kindred names glimmering behind her. An imaginative observer might have supposed her to be guarding these graves from profanation. She stood as if she had driven off an attack upon them; but what attack was it? who were they? what did it mean? To these questions she could give no answer. She stood and leaned upon the cold rail, and shed a few dreary tears on the marble beneath. There seemed to be nothing left to her but that marble, the iron railing, the chill graves that gave no response.

When she went in again, she had to close up her tears, her wondering pangs of curiosity, her dreary sense of loneliness, within herself. Was there

no one in the world, no one left to whom ever again she could say all she was thinking; whom she could consult, who would help her even in such a hopeless inquiry as this? Not Miss Jean, certainly, who looked up with her keen eyes from the tea-table, and said something about wet feet, and needless exposure, and the need to be resigned; nor little Milly, who was ready to cry and kiss her sister, but could do no more to aid her; nor even Uncle Charles, who had arrived suddenly with news of his own to occupy him, and who was impatient if she did not give him her entire attention for his particular business. These were all who belonged to Marjory, now, here or anywhere. Had she dreamt somehow? had she seen a vision? had there been revealed to her in a break of the stormy clouds—some one else?

CHAPTER II.

FANSHAWE left Pitcomlie with his head in a maze, affected as he had never been in his life, and had never supposed himself capable of being affected. He had been in love—as who has not, who has lived to be thirty?—but without feeling in the least as he felt now. In the feverish fits of that malady which he had experienced hitherto it was she, the heroine of the moment, that was foremost in his thoughts. He had been full of nothing but how to see her, how to have opportunities of talking to her, how to dance, or ride, or walk with her, according as the occasion favoured. In short, she had always belonged to some holiday version of life, and had been enshrined in a glittering framework of society, in which alone he knew her, and through which alone he could seek her presence. Half a dozen such loves at least, on a moderate computation, Fanshawe had experienced, and after having been made happy and miserable for a certain number of days or weeks, as it happened, society which brought her to him had swept her away again, and he had heard with resignation some time later that the temporary lady of his thoughts had become Mrs. or Lady Somebody Else. Sometimes a passing jar, of what is poetically called the heart-strings, hailed this information, and for a day

or so he would be very sorry for himself as a poor devil who could never hope to marry; but there it had ended, and in a week after he had felt better, and decided that, on the whole, everything was for the best. This, however, was not at all the state of his feelings now. He did not know whether he was in love with Marjory Hay-Heriot. Sometimes he did not think he was; but one thing he was sure of, which was that he was very much out of love with himself. None of those complacent self-compassionating plaints of the poor devil order occurred to him. His thoughts were of a kind much less easily managed. He was dissatisfied with himself and everything round him, with his means, his habits, his former life, his want of any actual existence worth speaking of, his complete unimportance to the world. He was young, strong, not badly endowed either in body or mind, with enough to live on, and no cares or trammels of any kind; and yet the fact was certain that, if he died to-morrow it would be no loss to any one; nobody would miss him; nothing would come to a stop. How many men would find themselves in the same position did they inquire into it? He had enough to live on, enough to keep a horse and a servant, to do whatever he pleased, to travel, to surround himself with such luxuries as he cared for, to get most things that he wanted. Except in that matter of a wife, which, to tell the truth, was a thing he had never very warmly wanted, there was nothing which he had denied himself. To be sure he was generally more or less in debt, but never so much that

he could not set his affairs right by an effort, if he had a strong enough motive for doing so. He had not thus the burden on his conscience that many other men have. He was a good-for-nothing, if we may use the expression, without being a scapegrace like Tom Heriot. He injured nobody. One time or other, though often considerably after date, he paid his bills. No man, or woman either, so far as he knew, was the worse for his existence, and yet——

There are a great many people who go harmlessly, pleasantly, through the world, who, if it ever occurred to them to place themselves by the side of a really useful member of society, and compare their lives with his or hers, would find themselves as much embarrassed by the contrast as Fanshawe was. But fortunately for the idlers of humanity, the contrast seldom strikes them with all the sharp distinctions of light and shadow which existed in this case. The *élégant* smiles complacently over the comparison, and finds in his own case a host of extraordinary circumstances which he feels to be really superiorities, and which raise him to a level very much higher than that of the plodding fellow by his side, who, like Atlas, carries a world on his shoulders. The race-horse is less useful than the dray-horse, but how different! This consolation generally lays the most flattering unction to the souls of the ornamental portion of society. How is it possible that the fine lady could feel herself anything but superior to the domestic dowdy who does so much more than she, and is of such inferior im-

portance in everybody's estimation? The butterflies of existence have always this comfort, or at least they take it in most cases; and no doubt Fanshawe, like other men of his acquaintance, had smiled and hugged himself on his superiority to the occasional industrial of his acquaintance who had toiled himself up into reputation at the bar, or made a slave of himself in parliament, while his schoolfellow lounged at his club, or fluttered in the Row, or (which was the most serious of his occupations) hunted or shot, or went fishing in strange waters. The comparison which had been suggested to him now, however, and the moral standard to which he had been suddenly forced to fit himself, was of a very different kind from that of the successful barrister or rising politician. And the effect upon his mind was complicated by the creation of so many new sentiments and necessities in himself, that the comparison went much further than a mere external contrast could have done. Ambition—a thing he had never known in his life—had sprung up within him; acquisitiveness—a desire to have, to possess, and to enjoy; an impatience of the present aspect and conditions of life; a sense of disgust with himself and his circumstances. These were not moral qualities, let us allow, nor amiable, nor in any way an improvement upon the gentle and light-hearted contentedness of the past. I am simply stating facts, and not demanding any approval of them. This was the new development to which Fanshawe had come. His past easy life was odious to him; he wanted to become on the spot something totally

different—something which seemed to him better, though morally it might not perhaps be so. Certainly at the first offset it was not a moral improvement. To substitute dissatisfaction for content, uneasiness for calm, care and mental restlessness for the happy *insouciance* of a man undisturbed by any thought of his career, was neither an advantage to himself, nor to anybody near him. He who had been the most good-natured, easy-going, well-conditioned fellow known to his friends, became all at once moody, uncertain, unmanageable. He had resolved to "make a change," and he was preoccupied, to the exclusion of everything else, with thoughts of what that change must be.

For it is a great deal easier to decide that you must turn over a new leaf, and that henceforward, instead of being useless, your life must be profitable to yourself and the world, than it is to decide how this change is to be accomplished. If every man when he begins to take thought of the more serious duties of life could immediately settle himself down as a landed proprietor, with an estate to manage, cottages to improve, farmers to influence, a seat on the bench, and a vote for the county, how many men would see their duty more clearly than they have ever as yet seen it! But we cannot attain all this simply by resolving upon it, and Fanshawe did not know what else to do. He would have made a very creditable squire, and so would hosts of men who don't make much of their lives in any other way; but he could not dig, nor did he know how to employ his existence so as to

fulfill his own wisnes, and be of some use to others. He was too old for many things, too old for the army, even could he have done any good in it, too old for the bar, too old for business; for although men in novels can turn their minds to commerce whenever a blank comes in their career, and succeed in it—yet men in common life are usually trained to that branch of activity as to every other, and begin by an apprentice period, in which they earn nothing and do little. Even for the public offices he was too old, and what, Fanshawe asked himself, could he do in a public office? He ran all these things over in his mind till he was in despair. He was willing to do anything; but when he came to particulars, he found that his education had trained him to nothing except those duties of a great proprietor which he had no hope of ever being able to exercise. Nothing is more difficult than thus to begin a new chapter in life. Had he required to earn his living, no doubt the energy which necessity would have given to his quest for employment might have found him something to do; but he had not that stimulus—and he had not the stimulus of aptitude for, or knowledge of, any special kind of occupation. He would have "done anything." Was that but another way of saying that he was good for nothing? he asked himself sometimes, in partial despair.

And then putting all these new fancies aside, he had really so much to do in the early Summer. He had to look after his sick horse, to see a great number of friends, to answer invitations, to make

some ordinary necessary preparations for the Derby and Ascot, and all sorts of other engagements. He had quite enough to fill his life with this ordinary round of trivial occupation, as it had been filled for all these years; and when he had returned to the usual circle of that life, it must be allowed that it was not disagreeable to him. It felt natural; and yet it was nothing—no good to him, no good to those among whom it was lived. No progress, either internal or external, was possible, so long as he continued in it. But what was he to do? What even did he want to do? Something, certainly—something that would restore him to the credit he had lost in his own eyes, that would make him worthy in Marjory's, that would improve his position, and help him to that natural growth and increase and elevation in life which had become so essential; but yet nothing that he knew of—nothing that he saw other people doing. Poor good-for-nothing! He wanted to "better himself," to be of some sort of use, to double his means, to make what was called establishment in life possible, to change himself, in short, from a nobody and nothing, into a man of some importance and consideration—a man fit to be trusted with the life and welfare of others. This was what he wanted; but he had not the smallest inkling of how it was to be brought about.

One thing however he did, and at once—he availed himself of the permission which Marjory had so unhesitatingly accorded to him, and wrote to her. He did this only a few days after he left Pitcomlie; indeed, he began his letter on the very

morning of the day on which he left, when he was no further off than Edinburgh—but destroyed that first letter and various others before he produced the following, which at last, after many doubts, he sent. How to begin it was a puzzle to him. The only thing he had any right to say was "Dear Miss Heriot;" but, somehow, that sober and correct address did not seem to suit the circumstances. This cost him a great deal of thought; he could think deeply, connectedly on such a subject, though he could not think to any purpose, in respect to the occupation which he was so anxious for. His letter kept running through his mind during all the interval—four days—which elapsed before he made up his mind to send it; and at last, as will be seen, he began abruptly, with no formal start at all, which seemed to him, somehow, more congenial than "Dear Miss Heriot." The letter was finished at midnight, but he left it open and read it over, and added something to it next morning before he sent it off; and after he had fastened up the envelope, was in a dozen minds whether or not to open it again and revise it once more. No new beginner in literature was ever half so careful and anxious for the success of his first work.

"I avail myself very eagerly of the permission you gave me to recall myself to your recollection. It is not that I am worth your recollection, but because I cannot bear the idea of falling out of it. How can I sufficiently tell you what it has been to me to have felt myself one of the household of

Pitcomlie, to have grown into its ways, to have been part of its life at so sad a moment? I feel almost as if you must think me unfeeling, unsympathetic in your sorrows, when I say that I am glad I was there at this time, rather than at another. I wonder if you will know what I mean? I grieve for you to the bottom of my heart, and yet I am glad that I was there. Life outside, life here in London, where, people say, and I suppose believe, there is so much movement and excitement, seems to me very tame and vacant. I can't think how my old friends can endure the mill-horse round of engagements, all so null, so monotonous, and like each other;—because they have not been in Fife, I suppose. And yet Pitcomlie is very quiet, you will tell me? I wonder if you are there; or if the recent events have made it insupportable to you; or what you are doing? I keep thinking and wondering over this, and whether you will remember me again, or be so good, so very good as to tell me all I want to know, and answer me half of the flood of questions which are ready to be poured out upon you. May I ask them? I am sure at heart you are too good not to say yes or no. I want to know about Mr. Charles; whether he has left his tower, and his papers, and all those treasures which he was so kind as to show me; and about dear little Milly, whom I can no longer tempt to laugh at an unbecoming moment. How I should like to try! and to see her look of fright, which is her own, at her wickedness; and then that delightful gravity, which is yours, settling over her small face. I want

to know everything about her, and about your uncle;—and anything you will tell me; any little scrap or crumb from your table—about you.

"There are a great many things I should like to tell you about myself, if it did not seem abominable impertinence to hope that you would take any interest in such an indifferent personage. Nobody can be more thoroughly aware than I am how little there is to say about me, that would be pleasant to your ear. I have had one kind of dubious good quality in my past life, and that has been content; now I have lost that even. What a poor sort of affair is the life we live without thinking of it, we wretched fellows who are, I suppose, the scum, and float on the surface of the stream, going wherever it carries us, in a helpless, hopeless sort of way, that must appal and disgust any one who has ever known better. Having had a glimpse of the better, I am disgusted too, and begin to make a fuss among the other atoms, and long to cling to something, to oppose the power of the tide, and get some kind of independent action into me. I wonder if you will know what I mean? How often I find myself wondering this—asking myself if it would be comprehensible to you; or if you would simply scorn the poorer sort of being whose existence has been so long without plan, or purpose, or pilot? This would be very natural; but I like to think that you would rather try to understand, knowing what a great thing it would be for me if you would take so much trouble. I am no theologian, and dare not pretend to speak on such subjects; but yet, if

the angels would take the trouble to enter a little into our mortal concerns, how much good it would do us! Do not you think so too? or do you think I am talking nonsense? which very likely is the case, since I want to talk the best of sense, and mean a great deal, which I am not clever enough to say.

"May I write again soon? and will you give me a line—just a line—three or four words, if no more, to tell me that you still remember the existence of one who is always

"Your faithful servant,

"E. F."

This letter Marjory read at the breakfast-table, seated between Aunt Jean and Uncle Charles, with little Milly opposite to her, and all the commonplaces of ordinary talk going on. How bewildered would those good folks have been could they have read it over her shoulder! How bewildered did she feel reading it, moved to an interest which made her half indignant with herself, and feeling impatient with the writer for that restrained glow of feeling, which notwithstanding communicated to her a sympathetic thrill. "Ridiculous!" she said, and felt her cheeks glow, and her heart move a little, notwithstanding all she did to control it.

"That's a long letter, May," said Mr. Charles, looking at it with some curiosity as she put it carefully back into its envelope.

"It is from Mr. Fanshawe," she said, with a consciousness for which she could have taken in-

stant vengeance on herself; "he has gone to London. He said he would let me know where he had gone."

"Oh!" said Mr. Charles; and Miss Jean's eyes lighted up.

Marjory let the letter lie by her plate as if it was of no importance, but felt her cheeks grow hotter and hotter. Ridiculous! She determined to write him a most matter-of-fact reply, which should make an end of this discursive nonsense. If he thought she had leisure for a sentimental correspondence, she must convince him to the contrary; how absurd it was! And yet to be thus put upon a pedestal of absolute superiority, and worshipped in this covert way, is not in itself disagreeable. A little weakness stole about her heart; insensibly it occurred to her during the forenoon that there were several things she would like to consult him about. She slid the letter quietly into her pocket before she left the table. It happened to her to look at it again during the course of the day, just "to see what he had said" about his present occupations. As it happened he had not said anything. But how was Marjory to recollect that?

CHAPTER III.

Mr. Charles Heriot had not come to the High Street without an object. He had left Pitcomlie on the morning after Marjory left it, and had proceeded straight to his house in Edinburgh to review the capabilities of George Square; and he had not been very well satisfied with those capabilities. The house had not been inhabited since it had been in his possession. It was an excellent old-fashioned house, worth a dozen of the ordinary habitations which fall to your lot and mine, dear reader; but it was furnished with mere chairs and tables, book-cases and side-boards, not with any associations or kindly customs of use and wont. There was some old spindle-legged furniture, which had belonged to some Leddy Pitcomlie in the beginning of last century, with which Marjory could have made a quaint corner to live in, in one part, at least, of the chilly, uninhabited drawing-room, converting it all at once into such a chamber as some Jacobite lady might have received the Chevalier in, or where Mrs. Anne Keith might have discoursed to young Walter Scott. But Mr. Charles's imagination was dulled by the vexations and embarrassments that possessed him, and he could not realize this; and his decision about George Square was that it would not do. The chain of habit was very hard to break with Mr.

Charles; but when once broken, he was impatient, and almost lawless, rushing into any novelty that presented itself. The novelty in this case, however, was not extravagant. What he did was simply to take a house in St. Andrew's for the summer; and it was this which he had come to intimate to the household in the High Street.

"Not but what Marjory would be very happy with you, poor thing," he said to Aunt Jean; "perhaps more happy than I can hope to see her; but still it will be more of a change. After griefs like hers, and all that has happened, I have always heard that a change was the best thing; and as she's used to me and my ways—"

"You need not apologize, Chairles Heriot," said the old lady. "If I ever deluded myself I was to get a companion, it's best to undeceive me; but I did not delude myself. I'm used to live alone, and no doubt after the first I would have gone back to my crabbed ways. But there's one thing I must say. I'm fond of the girl, though she maybe does not give me credit for it, and she shall have all I've got to leave; I said in my haste she was my natural heir, and too natural, and a Miss Heriot doomed, all her days, like me. But mind this, if you take May away, I'll no have her back. I give her to you on one condition, and that is, that you'll marry her well. Marry that girrl, and marry her well, and you'll have my blessing, and I'll think better of ye, Chairles, than I've ever thought all your days."

"Marry her, and marry her well!" cried Mr.

Charles, in dismay; "and how am I to do that? I have never married myself, and neither have you."

"That has nothing to do with it," said Miss Jean, promptly. "The more reason that Marjory should; there's enough of us poor dry trees, with nothing to leave behind. If you have any respect for the past generation, of which I'm the last representative, Charlie Heriot, you'll do what I say. Marry her well; she's worthy the trouble. She'll make such a man's wife as few men deserve, that's my opinion. Mind, I'm not saying but what she might be mended; but marry her, and marry her well, Charlie, or you'll get nothing from me."

"Perhaps you would tell me how I'm to do it?" said Mr. Charles, with sarcastic seriousness.

"If you cannot find that out for yourself, you'll never do it by my teaching," said Miss Jean. "Well I know ye have but little sense, you useless men; but ye know other men, if you do nothing else. If it was a wife, now, that I wanted for a likely lad, do ye think I could not lay my hand on one? aye, and bring it to pass, too, if there was not something sore against me. Keep your eyes open, and when ye see a man that's worth the trouble, take him to your house—since ye are to have a house; and meddle no more, Charlie Heriot, after ye have done that; meddle no more. The first step is in your power, but the rest they must do themselves, or it will never be done. That's my advice. Friends can do a great deal, but there's a leemit which they must never pass. Once let May see what you have in your head, and there's an end of it all. Without

judgment, ye'll never succeed in that, nor, indeed, in anything else, as ye might have learned from the family letters ye are so fond of. But the Heriots have never minded their daughters; they have left the poor things to themselves. There's me, for example; not that I'm regretting my lot. A man would have been a terrible trouble to me; I could not have been fashed with a creature aye on my hands. But Marjory's young enough to accustom herself to her fate, whatever that may be."

"I hope so," said Mr. Charles, with some impatience; "but if you think that I am going to take home every man about the Links to see whether our May is good enough for him—"

"That's just like one of your interpretations," said Miss Jean, with quiet scorn. "'Any man that's worth the trouble,' said I; 'every man upon the Links,' says he; it's just what a woman has to expect. And Marjory may have settled for herself, so far as I know. There was that English lad, that you and poor Thomas, like two wise men, had so much about the house—"

"Fanshawe? I don't think he has a penny," said Mr. Charles.

"Most likely no, or ye would not have taken such pains to throw him in the girrl's way. He was not ill-looking, and he had a taking manner, and when the heart's soft it's easy to make an impression; she has a kind of absent look at times. And there's Johnnie Hepburn, not a great match, but well off, that would give his two e'en if she would but look at him—"

"Johnnie Hepburn is not an ill lad," said Mr. Charles, inclining for the moment, if Marjory's marriage was to be brought into the foreground, to seize on the easiest way of deciding it; "but in the meantime," he added, recalling his thoughts, "neither marrying nor giving in marriage is in her head—or mine either—with three deaths in the family."

"Oh aye!" said Miss Jean; "ye need not tell me the importance of what's happened. Both to us now living and to all the race, it's a terrible thing to think of, that both sons should be swept away, and a poor little bairn with a strange woman of a mother, a mindless creature that kens none of our ways, should be all that's left to succeed. Never since I mind has anything happened like it. However, we must all die; but there's no the same necessity in marriage, and that's why I'm speaking. I'm old, older than all them that's gone. Before ye see me again, I may be on the road to Comlie kirkyard, beside the rest—which is one good thing," Miss Jean added, with her sharp eyes twinkling, "of a maiden state like yours and mine, Charlie. No other family has any share in us. We are sure, at least, to lie with our own at the last."

"Ay, to be sure," said Mr. Charles, who was not thinking of any such consolation, and who was glad to recur to his original subject. "We'll live very quietly, and see no company. St. Andrews is one of the places where you can see many people, or few, according to your inclination; and I'll have my quiet game, and May will have her sister to take up

her mind. For the time being, Aunt Jean, I cannot see that we could do better; and I will always be at hand in case of that foolish young woman at Pitcomlie going wrong altogether."

"I would let her go as wrong as she likes," said Miss Jean. "It's aye shortest in the end to leave folks free to their own devices. When she's done all the harm she can to herself and other folk, she will yield to them that knows better. But I must go and look after your dinners. You'll miss your grand cook with all her made dishes, Charlie. I hear it was you that settled yon woman at Pitcomlie, and they tell me she's to be married upon Fleming (the auld fool) and they're to set up in some way of business. I cannot abide waste for my part, and when a woman that can cook—which she could do, I say it to your credit, though I hate a man that's aye thinking of what he puts into him—goes and gives up her profession and marries a poor man that wants nothing but broth, or maybe a stoved potatoe——"

"They should take up a tavern—they should take up a tavern," said Mr. Charles, with some excitement. "Bless me! her collops are just excellent; and I know nobody that can serve you up a dish of fish and sauce, or salmon steak, or a tender young trout stewed in wine, followed with a delicate dish of friar's chicken——"

"The Lord preserve us from these greedy men!" said Miss Jean. "The water's in his e'en over his friar's chicken; which is as wasteful a dish and as extravagant as any I know. You must try to put

up with my poor Jess's plain roast and boiled. It will be a trial, no doubt; but I must go and give her her orders," said the old lady, marching downstairs with her cane tapping on every step. She went to the kitchen, and stirred up the artist there, whose powers were anything but contemptible, by sarcastic descriptions of her nephew's tastes. "You would think to hear him that nobody could dress a decent dish but yon woman at Pitcomlie," Miss Jean said, artfully, "and he's very great on fish, and thinks none of us know how to put a haddie on the table. It's not pleasant for an honest woman like you that have been born among haddies, so to speak, Jess; but you must not mind what an epicure like that may say. For my part, I'm always very well pleased with your simple dishes."

"Simple dishes! my certy!" said Jess to herself, when her mistress had withdrawn; and being thus pitted against her important rival at Pitcomlie, the *cordon-bleu* of the High Street went to work with such a will, that Mr. Charles was smitten with wonderment and humiliation.

"It is wonderful the talent that is hidden in out-of-the-way places," he said afterwards, when describing this feast; and when you reflect that he did not know what sort of cook was awaiting him in St. Andrews, and did know that the good woman in George Square was good for nothing beyond an occasional chop, it may be supposed that his pretensions in presence of Miss Jean were considerably lessened. This gave Mr. Charles more thought than

that other matter of the necessity of marrying Marjory. Now that Marjory belonged as it were to himself, forming indeed the very first of his conditions of existence, he did not see the necessity of any change. He said to himself, as her father had once said, "No husband would be so considerate of her as I am. She will never get so much of her own way again," and felt that the suggestion that Marjory should be married was an impertinence especially offensive to himself. That could be dismissed, however, with little ceremony. It was a more serious matter about the cook.

Some weeks, however, elapsed before the removal to St. Andrews was effected, and in those weeks things went very badly with the household at Pitcomlie. Fleming, being further aggravated after Mr. Charles's departure, decided upon leaving at once instead of waiting for the term, which had been his first intention.

"A man may argufy with a man," he said, when he announced his final decision to Mrs. Simpson, "but to put up with a wheen woman is mair than I'm equal to. Stay you, my dear, if you think proper; but I'm auld enough to take my ain way, and I'll no stay to be driven about by these new leddies. If it had been Miss Marjory, it would have been another kind of thing; but, by George, to put up with all their tantrums, me an auldish man, and used to my ain way and very little contradiction, and a man engaged to be married into the bargain! I'll no do't."

This was a serious blow to the house. The

footman, who had been thereupon elevated by Matilda to Fleming's place, was elated by his advancement, and conducted himself towards the maids in a way which produced notice of resignation from several of the women. And Mrs. Simpson, when it came to her turn to bear, unsupported by her Fleming, the daily burden of the "new leddy's" unsatisfactory manners, struck work too, and decided that it was not worth her while to struggle on even for the short time that remained.

"I'm weel aware, mem," she said to Verna, who had attempted a private remonstrance, "that we should act, no as ithers act to us, but as we would that they should do. That's awfu' true; but I canna but think He would have made a difference Himself, if it had been put to Him, in the case of a servant. You see, naturally we look up to them that are above us for an example; we dinna set up to give them an example, which would be terrible conceited. And a woman like me, with a' the care of the house on her head, and slaving over the fire, dressing dishes that I have no heart to touch by the time they come to me—Na, na! it's no from the like of me that a Christian example should be expectit. And then you must mind it's said in the Bible as weel, 'I will be good to him that is good, and froward to him that is froward.' I humbly hope I'm a Christian woman, but I canna go beyond Scripture. And what is a month's wages to me? I've been long in good service, and I've put by some siller, and I dinna doubt but you've heard, mem, that though I'm no so young as I once was,

I have—ither prospects; and ane that will no see me want. So as for the month's wages, I've made mair sacrifices than that."

"The money is not much," said Verna; "but the character, Mrs. Simpson. My sister will be very much put out, and she forms very strong opinions, and she might say——"

"Your sister, mem!" the housekeeper answered in a blaze of passion; but then feeling her superiority, paused and controlled herself. "When Mistress Chairles is as well kent in the countryside as I am, it will be time to speak about characters," she said. "Characters, Lord preserve us! am I like a young lass wanting a character? You're a stranger, Miss Bassett, and a weel meaning young leddie, that has nae intention to give offence, I ken that; and I think no worse of you for judging according to your lights; but when it's said that Mrs. Simpson, housekeeper for ten years at Pitcomlie, has left her situation, who do you think will stand most in need of an explanation—Mistress Chairles, or me? If I wanted a new place, it would not be to her I would come to recommend me. And as it happens," said the housekeeper with modest pride, "I'm no wanting a new place; I'm going home to my ain house."

"But, dear Mrs. Simpson, it will be so very, very inconvenient for us; what shall we do?" cried Verna, driven to her last standing-ground.

"I'm no blaming you, mem," said Mrs. Simpson, with dignity; "but Mistress Chairles should

have taken mair thought what she was saying to a decent woman—that has never been used to ill language. If she wanted me to consider her, she should have shown me a good example and considered me."

"This is what you have made of it in one month," cried Verna, rushing into the room in which her sister sat. "She's going to-morrow; she will not stay an hour longer. By coaxing, I got her to consent not to go to-night. This is what your management has come to. Every servant in the house is leaving at this horrid term, as they call it; and you, who don't know anything of English housekeeping, nor the customs of the place, nor what you ought to do—"

"Oh, Verna; but *you* know!" cried Matilda, frightened at last by the universal desertion, and taking refuge—as was her wont—in tears.

"I know! you have refused my advice, and laughed at all my remonstrances; you have never listened to a single word I have said since that day when the will was read. I have made up my mind to give up, like the rest."

"Oh, Verna, don't! oh don't forsake me; what shall I do? If I am a little quick-tempered, is that my fault? I am always sorry, and beg your pardon. I will beg your pardon on my knees. Oh, Verna! and the Ayah going, and everybody. I shall get no sleep with baby, and no rest with all these worries. If you go and forsake me, I shall die!"

"You treat me just like one of the servants,"

said Verna; "except that I have no wages. I don't know why I should stay to be bullied and made miserable. I will go too. I can have the Ayah to take care of me, and poor papa will be glad enough to see me again."

"Oh, Verna, for heaven's sake! for pity's sake, for the sake of my poor, poor unfortunate babies! You shall have everything you can think of; everything you would like—"

"Yes, all that is unpleasant!" said Verna; "the kicks, but not the halfpence; the battles with the servants, and everything that is disagreeable—"

"Verna! if I promise never to do anything but what you like, never to say anything you don't approve of—to do always what you advise me? Oh, Verna! if I say I will be your slave!" cried Matilda, throwing herself upon her sister's neck.

Then Verna allowed herself to be softened.

"I didn't want to come," she said. "I came for your sake, and poor Charlie's. I don't want to stay; it's cold and wretched here; I like India a great deal better; but if I should try a little while longer, and make an attempt to keep you straight, will you promise to take my advice, and do what I tell you? It is of no use my staying otherwise. I am quite ready to pack up and go back to India; make up your mind what you will do."

"I will do whatever you please," said Matilda, dissolved in tears.

"For you know you are a fool," said Verna calmly; "you always were; when you came out a girl, and gave us all that trouble about the cadets

in the ship—when you married poor Charlie, and led him such a life—when you came back here and insulted Miss Heriot, and made the house miserable; you have always been a fool, and I suppose you cannot be different; but, at least, you ought to know."

"Oh, Verna, I will!" cried the penitent; and it was thus with her blue eyes running over with tears, with her lips quivering, and her pretty face melting into its most piteous aspect, that Mr. Hepburn found the young mistress of the house when he went to Pitcomlie, charged with a message, which Marjory, wearied by his importunate desire to serve her, had invented for the purpose. He had not been thinking of Mrs. Charles. She was Marjory's supplanter to him, and a thoroughly objectionable personage. But when he came suddenly into the room, and saw this weeping creature with her fair hair ruffled by her emotion, tears hanging on her eyelashes, her piteous little pretty mouth trembling and quivering, the sight went to the young man's susceptible heart. No secondary trouble, such as quarrels with her servants, or the desolation consequent upon that amusement occurred to him as the possible cause for the state in which he found her; no doubt crossed his mind that it was the woe of her widowhood that was overwhelming her. He stopped short at the door out of respect for the sorrow into which he had intruded unawares. He explained with perturbation that he was the bearer of a message; he begged pardon metaphorically upon his knees. "Pray, pray assure your sister that I would not have

intruded for the world; that I feel for her most deeply," he said, the sympathetic tears coming to his own eyes.

"She will be better presently," said wise Verna, "and it will do her good to see some one. She indulges her feelings too much. Poor child! perhaps it is not wonderful in her circumstances—"

"How could she do otherwise? I remember Charlie so well; may I speak of him to her?" said this sympathetic visitor.

Verna received this prayer very graciously; she said, "It will do her good;" and now she will have something to amuse her, she added, in her heart.

CHAPTER IV.

HEPBURN amused Mrs. Charles very much, though that was not considered one of his capabilities in Comlie. He roused her gradually from her depressed state into general conversation. After he had delivered Marjory's message, he stayed and talked, feeling a quite novel excitement and exhilaration in the fact of this social success, which was unprecedented in his experience. To be appreciated is doubly delightful to a man who is not used to much applause from his friends. Matilda was the first pretty woman who had "understood" him, who had permitted herself to be beguiled out of her private sorrows by his agreeable society. He was not the less faithful to Marjory, who had possessed all his thoughts as long as he could remember; but still it was pleasant to be able to comfort the afflicted, and to feel that his efforts for that end were successful. After a while, when the tears had been cleared away, when a gentle smile had stolen upon the fair countenance before him; when she had yielded to his fascination so far as to talk a little, and to listen eagerly, and to look up to him with those blue eyes, Hepburn could not but feel that Miss Heriot must have been deceived somehow, and that so gentle a creature must be easy "to get on with," to those who would be good to her. For the first time in

his life, he felt that there was something to excuse in the idol of his youth. Not a fault, indeed, but a failure of comprehension; and Marjory had never failed before in any particular, so far as her adorer knew. Perhaps the reason was that this gentle little widow was a totally different kind of woman. Various things he had heard on this subject occurred to Hepburn's mind to account for Marjory's failure. Women, even the best and cleverest, did sometimes fail to understand each other, he believed, upon points which offered no difficulty to an impartial masculine intellect. This was not at all a disagreeable thought; it raised him vaguely into a pleasant atmosphere of superiority which elated him, and could not hurt anybody. He even seemed to himself to be fonder of Marjory from the sense of elevation over her. Yes, no doubt this was the explanation. Mrs. Charles had done or said something which a man probably would never have noticed, but which had affected the more delicate and sensitive, but less broad and liberal nature of the sweetest of women; and Marjory, on her side, as he knew by experience, uttered words now and then which were not destitute of the power to sting. Hepburn thought that to bring these two together again would be a very fine piece of work for the man who could accomplish it. A loving blue-eyed creature like this could not but cling to Marjory's strength, and Marjory would derive beauty, too, from the fair being whom she supported. Yes, he thought, as he looked at her, Matilda was the kind of woman described in all the poets, the lovely

parasite, the climbing woodbine, a thing made up of tendrils, which would hang upon a man, and hold him fast with dependent arms. Marjory was not of that nature. To be sure, Marjory was the first of women; but there was a great deal to be said for the other, who was, no doubt, inferior, but yet had her charm. Hepburn felt that in the abstract it would be sweet to feel that some one was dependent upon him. Somehow the idea crept to his heart, and nestled there; but Marjory naturally would not have the same feelings. Marjory would be disposed rather to push away the tendrils. It was a different sort of thing altogether between the two women. Thus Hepburn felt a delicious superiority creep over him as he sat and talked. He received Mrs. Charles's confidences about the servants after a time, and was deeply sorry. Fleming and the rest seemed to him a set of savages, taking advantage of this sweet young creature's ignorance and innocence.

"Let me manage it for you," he said, eagerly. "I am not very clever about servants myself, but I will speak to my housekeeper, who knows everybody. She will find you some one. Let me be of some use to you."

"Oh, that will be so kind!" cried both the ladies. Johnnie Hepburn had never felt himself such a man during his whole life.

When Verna had thus arranged matters for her sister's comfort, she herself withdrew to put the house once more in order, and to resume the helm of state. She shrugged her shoulders when she left

the room, in which she left the new-comer quite happy, and Matilda in gentle good spirits.

"No wonder we think men fools," she said to herself; "and no wonder men think us fools," she added, philosophically, after a moment.

Thus it must have been decreed, she supposed, for the good of the species; and a blessed dispensation it was, if it could be confined to its present use of finding pleasant occupation for two incapables, and leaving those to work who could. But unfortunately Verna knew the process often went further than that. However, for the meantime she felt it necessary to be content with the advantages secured to her by the collapse of her sister's authority, and the merciful and most providential provision of some one to flirt with, thus accorded to her at the moment of direst need. Verna employed her afternoon so well that she even came to terms with Mrs. Simpson, who acknowledged the difference of having to deal with a reasonable young lady, who knew what was due—It was a pleasant afternoon for Miss Bassett; for the first time she went over the house, and realized the character of the kingdom which had come into her hands by deputy. She visited all the linen-presses, all the store-rooms; she took a peep into the plate-closet; she went and inspected the old wardrobes, where lay many antique stores, old dresses, and piles of what Mrs. Simpson called "body-linen," and lace which made her mouth water. "This must belong to Miss Heriot, I suppose," she said, trying to recollect what was named in the will. Verna had never known what an old

house was till now. She found oak cabinets and pieces of furniture which she knew to be of value, heaped up in garrets and on the landings of the many-turning stairs. She found drawers upon drawers full of *chiffons*, which she could appreciate still better; and in every out-of-the-way cupboard there was some piece of china, some curiosity such as Verna had vainly longed for all her life. They were there unseen, lurking in corners, not prized or thought of, and too many in number to be made visible; there was enough to decorate half-a-dozen houses; old brocade gowns which would cut up into the loveliest chair-covers, and old Dresden, which, if gathered together, would fill a room by itself. Oh! only to have half-a-dozen pieces of it in the house at Calcutta, or in any other house which Verna might call her own! She was perfectly honest, and would not have taken a penny from Tommy's possessions for the world; but the china went to her heart.

And then she put on her hat and went round the house outside. She took a very comprehensive view, taking her double eyeglass, which she kept for important moments, and studying the building thoroughly from every point of view. Women are deeply conservative, it is common to say; but at the same time there is no such iconoclast as an ignorant young woman longing for perfection, and secure in her own opinion. Verna thought the old house a most unnecessary adjunct to the new. The only useful part of it was the tower occupied by Mr. Charles, which would no doubt accommodate

a visitor if the house was very much crowded—but then if a new wing was built there would be a great deal more accommodation. Verna built the wing in her imagination, drawing it along the further side of the lime avenue, and planting long windows open to the ground in the new drawing-room, which would be much "snugger," she thought, than the old drawing-room which opened upon the cliff. She made a nice room for herself in the warmest corner facing to the south, for she was cold by right of being Indian, and liked to bask in the sun. How delightful was this sense of being supreme, this feeling of power, this capacity for doing as she liked! It seemed to her that she had fairly subdued Matilda, and that nothing would tempt that incapable person, after her failure, to meddle any more with the affairs which she had so mismanaged; besides Verna meant to make her sister very comfortable; she liked people to be comfortable. She had no inclination to oppress, or to be unkind. She meant to do more for Matilda than she would have done for herself, indulging her to the top of her bent, and putting up with all her weaknesses. Even to the length of providing somebody to flirt with, of taking her to gaieties which they had both dreamt of as girls, and had read about in books, without ever having it in their power to taste their sweetness, Verna was willing to humour her sister; and so long as she would consent to be quiet and enjoy herself, asked nothing more from Matty. That she should enjoy herself was necessary, as this was the only expedient Verna knew to keep her con-

tented. Finally she sat down on the steps of the sundial, where Marjory had sat so often, and turned over all her plans in her mind with a satisfaction which it would be difficult to describe in words. Nineteen years must elapse before Tommy should be of age. Nineteen years! a lifetime; and during that time there seemed no reason why she should not be virtual mistress of the place To be sure such a thing was possible as that she should marry; but Verna knew herself well enough to feel that she could trust herself, and would do nothing contrary to her own interests. If some one should by chance turn up with an estate and house equal to Pitcomlie, who had sense enough to see what an admirable mistress she would make for it, why then, indeed, marriage might be attractive, and an improvement upon present circumstances; but without an inducement of this kind, Verna felt herself to be safe. What happy visions floated through her brain as she sat on the steps of the sundial, and looked at the house which was to be her kingdom! What a thing it is to come suddenly from poverty and obscurity into wealth, and ease, and honour, and glory! Mr. Bassett out in Calcutta was not badly off, but he had brought up his daughters very economically, and he had not concealed his desire to get rid of them as soon as possible. Verna had thwarted and provoked her father by not marrying. He had sworn it was her fault, though she knew it was not her fault. Surely he could not wish nor expect her to marry a subaltern in a line regiment, which was all the Fates had sent in her way? But

still he had been dissatisfied, warmly asserting that the business of girls who came to India was to marry—well, if they could, but anyhow to marry—a view of the case which disgusted his daughter; and there were complications about a second half-caste family of young Bassetts which made her very glad to escape from her father's paternal care. After all the storms that had surrounded her existence, and all the shabbiness of her beginning, and fear of future shabbiness in store, it may be imagined what it was to Verna when her ship suddenly sailed into this bay of plenty. She disliked cold winds generally, but the cold wind to-day, though it blew from the east, did not affect her as she sat on the base of the sundial and contemplated her empire. Not without a struggle had that empire been attained. She had almost despaired when she saw how her sister in the strength of her folly, had put to flight the Heriots, and emptied the house; but still she had been patient and bided her time, and that time had come at last.

Short-sighted young woman! She did not perceive, till she had put up her eyeglass, that Johnnie Hepburn was leading Mrs. Charles out from the open window to take the air upon the cliff. When she did see it, she congratulated herself only on having found some one to amuse Matty — for she had no eyeglass to remedy that short-sightedness so far as the future is concerned, which is common to the human race.

Quite late in the same afternoon, when it was dark, and Miss Jean's house was pervaded with

fragrant odours of dinner, young Hepburn came in much out of breath, having walked very fast from Pitcomlie to fulfil his commission. He brought Marjory the books she had sent him for, with an excess of apologies for his delay, which, had she cared much about it, would certainly have enlightened her. He had been detained in the most remarkable ways, kept back by one thing after another. And he had found Mrs. Charles very poorly, and her sister quite anxious about her. "I am afraid she is very delicate," he said, sitting in the dark in Miss Jean's drawing-room, where, as the family were nearly ready for dinner, the candles had not yet been lighted. There was a glow of ruddy firelight just where Miss Jean herself was sitting, but all the rest were in shadow. And from somewhere in the room there came a "humph!" which confused the young man; however, it could not be Marjory who uttered that exclamation.

"I am sorry if she is ill," said Marjory immediately after; and then there was a pause, which Hepburn felt embarrassing. He wanted very much to say something which would be mediating and conciliatory, but the atmosphere certainly was against him; it was repelling and chilly. Women certainly do not understand women, he said in his heart; both so charming! what a thing that it is impossible to bring them together! and then he cleared his voice and tried again.

"I am afraid she is not accustomed to our kind of life," he said. "India is so different. Old Fleming has left, and the housekeeper is leaving,

and they don't know what to do. I promised to speak to Miss Jean—"

"Speak to anybody else, Johnnie, my man, before me!" said Miss Jean, peremptorily; "I've seen the young leddy, and I was not struck with her. She's bonnie enough, I allow, to please a silly lad; but she's not of the kind for me."

This was a very offensive speech to the amiable peacemaker. In the first place, of itself, that "Johnnie" made an end of him from the beginning. Of all names to apply to an aspiring young man intending to assume an elevated position, and feeling himself a person of influence, it is, perhaps, the cruellest title. Marjory smiled in spite of herself, protected by the darkness; and Mr. Charles — for he it was who made up the party, repeated that "humph!" which had broken in so disagreeably before.

"Don't sit in the corner and hum, hum, like that!" said Miss Jean promptly; "if you have a cold, Charlie, go to your bed, and be taken care of; but I cannot bide a hoasting man. We're all in a hum, hum sort of way, Johnnie Hepburn. Go away quick and change your clothes, and come back to your dinner; we'll be more amiable then; but come quick, for the fish will spoil; and Jess's temper is none of the best. Lord preserve us all!" said Miss Jean, turning upon her companions with her hand uplifted, when he was gone. "That woman's turned the laddie's head, the first time he's seen her! Now that's the old-fashioned way that used to be in my day; and I respect the lad!"

"You ought to respect the lady," said Marjory. She was amused; but yet not altogether amused. Johnnie Hepburn, for whom in himself she had a sort of elderly sisterly regard, had been her slave since ever she could remember. He had teased Marjory, and been very troublesome to her on many occasions; but he had worshipped her at all times, never thinking of any other woman. Miss Heriot was very much inclined to laugh at his championship of Mrs. Charles; but her amusement was mingled with a surprise which, perhaps, was not altogether agreeable. She had seldom been more startled; and when he came back to dinner, and the lamplight showed his youthful countenance considerably flushed with haste, or emotion of some kind, the wonder grew. The half-pique of which she was conscious, and which amused her too in its way, made Marjory somewhat satirical. "So you found Mrs. Charles very nice?" she said, when they were at table, looking up with a twinkle of laughter, which had been long absent from them, in her eyes.

"Nice?" said Hepburn, with hesitation. "Well, I do not know if that is the word I would use. It is touching to see a woman in her circumstances, so young and so——. She is very delicate, I think."

"She is very pretty, I think!" Marjory said, laughing.

Hepburn could not tell how it was that the laugh sounded so much less pleasant to him than ordinary. Was she laughing at him? She had done

so before now, and he had only worshipped her the more. But now he had just come from the spectacle of grief, borne in a becoming manner, and it seemed almost wrong of Marjory to be able to laugh; it disturbed his ideal. He took care to say as little as possible about Mrs. Charles for the rest of the evening, but still he did manage to intimate that he thought Marjory had not, perhaps, quite understood that delicate spirit. And Marjory replied that it was quite possible, but laughed again. Bell, the maid, was rather of Mr. Hepburn's opinion—that Marjory's capacity for laughter showed itself too soon.

"If it had been but the auld gentleman, indeed!" said Bell; "but three deaths, one after anither!" and Jess in the kitchen shook her head also, and said Miss Marjory had aye thought too little of appearances. They all kept a very close watch upon her, to make sure that she mourned enough, and not too much. Resignation is an excellent thing, and always to be encouraged; but resignation never was known to do more than smile.

And Marjory, I do not quite know why, wrote to Fanshawe that evening. She had meant to write to him some day or other; but it is possible that Johnnie Hepburn's desertion (though she had never made any account of Johnnie Hepburn), quickened her proceedings. She wrote him a most matter-of-fact little note, filling one page only of a sheet of note paper—without a word in it that would bear two meanings, or, indeed, possessed any meaning at all to speak of.

"This will put a stop to any further nonsense," she said to herself, as she wrote his address at his club — and she did this with much decision and promptitude. She was going with her uncle in a few days to St. Andrews; she was about cutting off all the threads that bound her to her old life. This was a bit of her old life, though it occupied the very last chapter. Fanshawe too, perhaps, might come back to Pitcomlie, and might think that she had not "understood" its new mistress. Marjory was about to begin a different kind of existence; she snapt this thread without, she thought, caring much about it; but it was better, certainly better, that it should come to an end.

CHAPTER V.

THE house which Mr. Charles Heriot had taken in St. Andrews was one of the oldest in that old town. The rooms were somewhat low and the windows small, and its aspect outside was, perhaps, just a little prison-like and closed up. You entered by a little door in the wall, which seemed made for clandestine stealing out and in, for ladies veiled and muffled, and gallant gentlemen disguised in the cloaks of romance. This small and jealous entrance, however, admitted the visitor into an old court all bowery on one side with jasmine and roses, and affording on the other a pleasant peep of a velvet lawn and old-fashioned garden. The third side of the square was filled up by the old house itself, upon which the sculptured arms of an old Fife family shone, over the door. This door was approached by high outside steps, under the shade of which appeared a lower door, which showed a red-tiled passage traversing the house, and another gleam of light and garden greenness at the other end. The sitting-rooms of the house were thus raised to a considerable height, and looked out from their small and deep-set windows on the ruins of the Cathedral and the blue sea beyond. Never were ruins more complete in their sunny annihilation of the past than the ruins of St. Andrews. They

have a sort of typical character for the students of Scottish history. Here the noble, rich, and splendid Middle Ages, which have conferred upon other nations their finest monuments and recollections, lie buried, as it were, in utter effacement, not scorned any longer—on the contrary, reverently preserved and taken care of—but blotted out from all possibility of use, and even from all meaning. But yet there is one monument of the past which still stands fast and sure as ever, the old homely, inarticulate tower of St. Regulus, belonging to a past which has no voice, a dark world which leaves everything to the fancy, and which has stood there through all changes for centuries, appealing by very absence of suggestiveness to that profound imagination which lies at the bottom of the Scottish character. The graceful clustered piers, the lovely decorated windows, the lordly breadth and majesty of aisle and nave, are too suggestive for that reticent and deep-seated faculty; but against the mysterious simplicity of that tower, which discloses nothing, no sacrilegious hand has ever been raised. It stands there in primitive gravity, plainness, lack of grace, as it might have stood in those days when the "pure Culdee, was Albyn's earliest priest of God;" flattering the mind of the nation with a subtle sense of its antiquity, consistency, unity in all ages. These reflections, however, are ours, and not those of Marjory Hay-Heriot, as she stood at the narrow window of her new dwelling-place, and looked out upon the same sea which washed her native headland. Her eye sought that first, as is natural to the eyes of

those who have been born upon its margin. Over the old ruins she looked to the older, everlasting thing, which is never antiquated, but keeps its youth continually. She could hear the sea dashing over the pier, and see how it rose, marking with a white line of surf the sweep of the bay beyond. That was enough to satisfy Marjory, even though the intermediate foreground was filled up by ruins and graves. Nature is always consolatory; but Art not always, not even the pathetic art of antiquity and decay.

In this old house the diminished family settled down, not without some sense of comfort. Mr. Charles had his golf, and Milly all the fresh delights of the Links and the sands, the shops and the streets, all of which were sweet to her unsophisticated intelligence. She thought the shops very fine indeed, and liked nothing so much as to go with her sister to buy a ribbon or a handkerchief; and the Links, with the flutter of gay colours about, the red-coats scattered here and there among the groups of golfers, the dresses of the ladies in their sacred corner, or fluttering about the outskirts of the ground devoted to the graver game, dazzled little Milly as with the pageant of an endless theatre, the thing most glorious to her eyes of anything on earth. Far be it from me to attempt to describe the ancient and royal game of golf. How shall a feeble feminine hand attempt to depict its delights and triumphs? St. Andrews is the metropolis of this — let us not call it game, but science. Here its professionals congregate, and its amateurs are happy. Twice round the Links in a day is the whole duty of man; and

one round maintains him in that decent condition of moral respectability, falling short of excellence, but above mediocrity, which is in some respects a more comfortable state than that of supreme excellence itself. Mr. Charles fell into this pleasant duty the very first day of his arrival. He was one of the oldest members of that club which has seated itself at the entrance of the Links, like a watchful mother, with bow-windows from which it contemplates benignantly all the out-going and in-coming groups, and tables at which matches are made up, and stories told of the prowess of Tom Morris and Bob Kirk, and how the General halved a game with the Captain, and how Mr. Innesmackie gave Dr. Boothby an odd a hole, and beat him. In these pieces of news everybody is as much, nay more, deeply interested than in all the affairs of the State. Mr. Charles went down to the club on the evening of his arrival. He was a little doubtful for the first half-hour whether, in his melancholy circumstances, after "three deaths in the family," it would be decorous for him to play; but these scruples were soon overruled.

"If there was anything fast or dissipated about it," said the Reverend Mr. Morrison, of St. Rule's, a member of the family which had had its blood vitiated by the introduction of the whaling captain, "I could understand your hesitation; but I play my game every day of my life, without its ever interfering with my duties as a parish Minister; and your good brother, poor Pitcomlie, is the last man in the world that would have thought of such a thing. No,

no, my dear Sir; play your game, and be thankful to Providence, that gives us such a wholesome and innocent amusement. It's just one of our many privileges," said piously the excellent divine.

"That's true," said Mr. Charles, still a little doubtfully, "but if it could be supposed for a moment to show any want, on my part, of respect——"

"Nonsense, nonsense, Heriot; nonsense, man," said Major Borthwick (there is a great collection of heroes on half-pay at St. Andrews.) "We cannot turn ourselves into tombstones, however willing we may be. I had a foursome all settled for to-morrow with old Tom and another professional against General Maclasher and myself. The General is suddenly called to Edinburgh on some business about his son, who is going out to Bombay by the next mail, and the match will be spoilt. I was making up my mind to send round and tell Tom; but you're just about as strong as the General, as good and no more. You'll come in, in his place? You would not, I am sure, fail an old friend."

"I would not like to do that, certainly," said Mr. Charles, "if you are sure you can find nobody better?"

"Have I time?" said the valiant Major. "It's ten o'clock, and by eleven to-morrow we ought to start—unless you would like me to stay up all night?"

"No, no, certainly not; if it's a real service to you," said Mr. Charles; and thus he was "led into it," as he said, to the relief of his conscience, and

great satisfaction generally of his being. Shut out from his papers and collections at Pitcomlie, golf gave him new life, as indeed it seems to do to many personages whom the reader may see on that busy stretch of seaside grass, should he ever travel to St. Andrews. I dare not go further into details, neither dare I tell very much about the life of this lively sober place, which is the oldest metropolis of learning in Scotland as well as of golf. For did I enter into the subject fully, not the most scrupulous care to avoid personalities could save me from the reproach of being guilty of them. Did I place an "atomy" in the chair filled by a certain Jove-like presence, I should still be believed to be putting the Principal in a book; and did I turn the gallantest of ancient gentlemen into an Orson, I should still be supposed guilty of sketching the Lord of the Manor. Far from me be such impertinencies. If you wish to become acquainted with the St. Andrews of social life, dear reader, go there and see for yourself.

As for Marjory, she was not permitted to sit in loneliness by her deep window, looking out upon the little homely pier and great magnificent sea, over the foreground of the ruins. Lady Castlemount called on the first practicable day, and so did all the ladies with territorial designations in the neighbourhood, such as Mrs. Haigh, of Highbarns; Lady Walker, of Berbo; Mrs. Home, of Strath, and many more—not to speak of the learned matrons of the University, and all in St. Andrews' town that was worthy of presenting itself to Miss Heriot, of Pit-

comlie. Everybody came who was anybody; and if Marjory could have been persuaded, like her uncle, that the mild form of golf practised by ladies was necessary to her health and comfort, abundant means of availing herself of the advantage of the Ladies' Links would have been presented to her. But Marjory was not inclined towards the Ladies' Links. She preferred the bold cliff at the old castle, the long sweep of the East Sands and the downs beyond. The East coast has never been, so far as we are aware, distinguished for beauty or picturesque qualities, but the bold line of those cliffs, bound at their feet by black ribs of half-visible reefs, iron corrugations of nature running far out, low and dangerous, into the sea—but bordered above high-water mark by the softest verdure of fine grass, mossy and velvety, mantling every height and hollow—has a homely yet wild and free beauty of its own, which, with all the endless varieties of colour upon the broad sea and broader heavens, makes up a scene worthy alike of painter and of poet. Here and there the rocks which line the dangerous coast rise into weird masses, like towers of defence. One of these, the Maiden's Rock, has actually taken the form of a mediæval tower; further on is a more fantastic erection, where time and water have worn the living stone into a huge resemblance of a spindle. This quaint mass towers over a bay full of broken rocks, among and over which the German Ocean dashes its stormy surf by times—while at other times it kisses softly, with many a twinkle of light and sheen of reflection, the stern stone which

it has been undermining for ages, with apparently so little effect. The Spindle Rock was the favourite end of Marjory's pilgrimage. The most sensitive organizations do not always fall sick after those great mental whirlwinds of grief and excitement which are the milestones of our lives. But there comes to them a moment when quiet and repose are necessary, when the mind lies still like a hushed child, refusing to think more or suffer more, opening itself to some certain fashion of natural sound and sight, and getting healing from that pause of all efforts or processes of its own. Marjory, unknowing, adopted this fashion of cure. She walked out to the Spindle (a long way) and would sit there alone day by day among the rocks, gazing half consciously over the broad level surface of the familiar sea, now and then crisped by soft winds, and overarched by the broad vault of sky, which softened down in endless variations of blues and greens, widening and fading to the horizon line, where sea and sky met in colourless brightness. The water lapped softly among the rocks, which here and there rose like pinnacles of some fantastic architecture over the brown uneven masses below. Among these rocks there were miniature oceans, crystal sea-pools lined with softest green sea-weed like a nest, where some cunning crab lived secure, or where those bloodless, boneless things, which are half animal and half plant, spread out their antennæ, pink, or creamy white, or silver green, upon the water. The shining of the sea, the ever-consolatory sound of its murmurous voice upon the rocks, the occasional

gliding past of a heavy fishing-boat with high brown sail, or the white butterfly wing of a rare pleasure-yacht, was enough to give occupation to the fatigued mind, which found healing in every hum of well-known sound, in every familiar motion of that native sea. Hush! said the soft long rustle of the water searching into every corner, rising and falling like the breath of some watcher. Hush! said the soft wind with a musical murmur about the lofty rocks; hush! said the dreamy whirr of insect life upon the grass beyond. The sun shone warm, and little flecks of white clouds floated across the sky with the wind as the scattered sails did below. Soft motion, sound, murmur of life filling the whole vast sphere—nothing that seemed like ending, dying, sorrow. Marjory, who loved the sea like one to the manner born, accepted this tranquil hush without remarking how fatal were its other voices, and opened herself to the sunshine and had her wounds slowly healed.

One day, however, going a little further than the Spindle, she found herself in front of a very homely thatched cottage, one of those odd little green-brown erections so extremely objectionable in a sanitary point of view, yet so satisfactory to the eye, which grow out of Scottish soil wherever improvement has not banished them, like the creation of nature. The walls were built of rough stone covered with the mosses of many years. The thatch was patched and ancient, bright bits of straw recently put in peeping out from the dark surface. The cottage consisted of a "but and a ben," no more,

that is a room on each side of the low and narrow doorway—with one small window in each, facing to the sea, and a rude bit of so-called garden, surrounded by a little rough wooden paling enclosing the door. This cottage lay in a hollow between two cliffs, and was sheltered from the wind on each side; the short rich grass, like a warm cloak thrown over the sunny nook, mantled up to the very walls; and the cottage had all the sunshine, and as little of the chill as was possible. Marjory had vaguely noticed a figure seated near the door for two or three days before she approached it, and a certain curiosity had risen in her mind—nay, a something more than curiosity, a sympathetic feeling, that the other unknown woman was like herself resting after some convulsion of nature, and seeking restoration from the calm, and the sunshine, and the salt sea. This feeling grew to a strength which surprised her, when she saw the same figure languidly seated on the same spot the second day; and on the third some natural affinity drew the two together.

The girl at the cottage-door was younger than Marjory—very young, with fair hair folded back from a pale little face, and knotted loosely behind, as used to be the custom years ago. A rusty black gown, with long close sleeves down to her slight wrists, made in the plainest fashion, threw out, into still further relief, the colourless face and locks, out of which illness seemed to have driven the tone of colour which had enlivened their paleness. There were little rings of pale gold upon her white temples,

but the mass of her hair had lost its brightness. Her face was one of those pathetic faces which it is difficult to realize in the glow of happiness. Her eyes were grey, large, and lucid, with that liquid softened light which is like moonlight in a face. Her features were delicate and worn, the nostrils somewhat pinched with suffering, the very lips pale. Intense capacity for pain was in the face, and at the same time a quiet patience and power of suffering. She met the eye of the stranger who looked at her sympathetically, with a faint but friendly smile, and gave her the usual country salutation, "It's a fine day," with a softness of tone which touched Marjory, she could scarcely tell how. It was Marjory who made the first advance; but the response was to her look, rather than to anything she said. The girl did not rise and curtsey, as an English girl of similar condition would most likely have done to greet the lady. But in her gentle attempt at acquaintance, and the soft little evanescent smile, with which it was accompanied, there was an appeal which only a hard heart could have resisted; and Marjory had a rural lady's habit of constant intercourse with her social inferiors.

"Yes," she said, "the weather is very fine for this time of the year. (It was June, but in Scotland it is difficult to calculate upon the weather so early in the summer). But I am afraid you are ill. Do you live always here?"

"Ay, mem, I'm not well," said the girl. "They have brought me here for change. It pleases them; and I like to hear the sound of the sea—not that

it will do me any good. I am too far gone for that."

"You must not think so," said Marjory, with that instinctive denial of the plainest fact, which is human nature's first idea in the presence of approaching death. "You are very young, and the sea always does good. Will you tell me what is the matter?"

The girl smiled again. "It's nothing," she said, "and everything—it's a failing; some doctors say it's decline—but it's no decline, it's just a failing. I'm thinking the chief thing is that I'm weary, weary of this life, and I would like to go—"

"But that is wrong," said Marjory, shocked. "At your age it is unnatural. You ought to resist such a feeling."

"What for?" said the girl, very gently. "They all say that; but I've gone over my Bible from end to end, and there is nothing against it. You're no to think I would do myself harm, for that would be a sin and a shame to them that's left behind. But Paul was wiser, far wiser than me, and he says, 'that to depart is better.'"

"To be with Christ," said Marjory, unconsciously correcting, and feeling somehow a certain consolation in the fact, that it was not Paul's saintly longing, but only human weariness that spoke.

"I'm meaning that," said the girl, gently; and then with a sadder tone, "and to make sure that they are safe and well that have gone before."

These words brought Marjory to a pause. The upraised face beside her, with those lucid eyes

turned to the sky, seemed to be penetrating that blue veil with an anxiety only tempered by weakness. Marjory looked at her till tears came into her own eyes.

"Don't you think we may trust God for that?" she said. "You have lost—friends?"

"And you are in black, too," said the girl, quickly, "and I'm sure you sit about the rocks, as if you had no heart. Oh, I'm ready to trust God! but if you heard how our folk speak! and if one was taken suddenly—no thinking, in the middle of his days—one that had never made any profession, nor showed any concern about his soul—would you say then, 'Trust God?' That's the question I'm aye asking myself."

"I lost a brother so," cried Marjory, moved to open her heart, she could not tell why.

"Ah!" The girl looked at her fixedly for a moment, and pressed her thin hands together. The cry had burst from her lips like an outcry of fear and pain.

"And I do trust God," Marjory resumed. "God saw all he meant, not only what he did. Were you never misunderstood? We are better in our hearts than we are in our deeds; but God never misunderstands."

"That's true," said the girl, clasping her hands again, "that's very true. Oh, if you but kent what misunderstanding there is in this world? and whiles them that are most fond of you; but as you say, mem, never with God; that's a great comfort. Sometimes I think my heart will break—"

"I am a stranger to you," said Marjory, "but I should like to help you if I could. Is it anything you could confide to me?"

The girl's face, so calm in its sorrowfulness, grew agitated. She gave one anxious look into Marjory's face. She cast her eyes around, watching if anyone was visible. "No to-day, no to-day!" she exclaimed. "A stranger—what could I say to a stranger? But I'm tired, tired, and the wind is cold. I must go into the house—to-day."

She rose as if in terror, and stumbled in her weakness. "I will go away," said Marjory, "do not let me drive you in-doors. I am going back to St. Andrews—"

Then the girl turned, holding out her two thin hands; a little hectic flush had come on either cheek. "I'm so weakly," she said, with a pathetic smile; "no fit for anything; but, oh, you'll come again?"

CHAPTER VI.

THE weather changed that evening, as was natural after three or four heavenly days. The East coast is not rainy like the West; but the soft continuous rain of the Western Highlands is scarcely so terrible as the westerly haar, which wraps everything up in white wool, and blots out sea and sky, and chokes the depressed wayfarer—not to speak of the penetrating chill which even in June goes down into the marrow of your bones, and makes the scrap of standing-ground, which is all that is left you in the misty world, as lonely as an alp, and as dull as a fen. Even the golfers at St. Andrews feel this miserable influence. When those bright links are reduced to so many dark sepia blots, when the sky can be expressed only by the same woeful colour, when the surf on the sands seems to send up a blinding woolly steam over the faint and limp yellow of the cliffs; when his very red coat hangs limp and damp upon the hero's back, who goes out, notwithstanding the weather, and the best "driver" on the links cannot get his ball across the burn—then the very golfer is discouraged. But the population is accustomed to the infliction, and the matches still go on, and new fights are arranged in the club; and in the town, business and amusement proceed as usual, and the good people walk about

the streets, and pay each other visits to keep their hearts from sinking. It is scarcely possible, however, though your heart may be stout, and your chest sound, to walk out to the Spindle in an easterly haar; so that Marjory did not see the new acquaintance who had interested her so deeply for some days. She saw, however, a sight which interested her almost as much, though in a different way—the young woman who had visited Pitcomlie the evening before her father's funeral, and whom she had afterwards met at the family grave. It was in the chief street of St. Andrews that this meeting took place—a broad and handsome street, lined with old houses at the lower end, and terminating at the upper in an old gateway, one of the few perfect relics of the past that remain among so many ruins. Marjory was walking with little Milly, as usual, by her side, pressing into her very steps—her golden hair asserting itself as a point of colour, even in the persistent greyness of the street and the mist of the atmosphere.

"May, May!" Milly was saying; "there is a lady bowing to you from the carriage-window yonder; there is a gentleman taking off his hat. Why don't you pay any attention? If it was me, you would say it was not manners."

"Come in and look for a book at Mrs. Fletcher's," said Marjory, by way of repelling this attack. Milly was already a prodigious novel-reader, and instantly caught at the bait. Her sister stood at the door of the shop, while the little girl ran in eager to survey the many antiquated volumes, and the few fresh

ones which form the circulating library of a country town. Of the many passers-by who went ghost-like through the mist, a great many knew and saluted Miss Heriot, of Pitcomlie; but it was on one who did not salute her that Marjory's attention was fixed. The dress was precisely the same as that of half the other women moving about the town, but yet the little brown hat and cotton gown suddenly grew individual and remarkable, as Marjory recognized the wearer. She was walking briskly along, with the air of one profoundly occupied, looking neither to the right hand nor to the left. Suddenly she raised her head as she passed in front of the shop door where Marjory stood, and their eyes met. The young woman grew suddenly red; she gave Miss Heriot a quick, defiant look, and would have passed on without any recognition. Marjory was startled and excited, but she did not lose her presence of mind; she made a step out from the door. "Surely you know me," she said quietly. The young woman paused, as if perforce, but held her ground.

"Yes, Miss Heriot, I know you very well; you've spoken to me twice before—when I was not wanting," she added doggedly, "to speak to you."

Marjory had some difficulty in keeping her temper, for this persistent resistance was provoking, to say the least. She said with some haste: "There can be very little reason why I should insist upon speaking to you."

"I ken none, Miss Heriot."

"Well!" said Marjory, with an impatient sigh, "neither do I. You know, I am sure, a great deal more than I do. But remember—you may be sorry some day for having refused to tell me what you wanted at my father's house; and by that time it may be too late."

She turned away, disturbed vaguely, as she had always been, by the appearance of this strange woman; but her withdrawal seemed to affect the other more than her questions had done. Before Marjory had re-entered the shop, the stranger spoke in a hesitating tone: "Miss Heriot, I am meaning no harm to you; there is, may be, something that I may come and tell you—that concerns you and yours, as well as me and mine; but I canna do it now. I thought you were artful and proud, but now I think you're true. Maybe there is nothing in it; if there is, I will tell you the first. But I will say nothing till I hear the truth."

"What truth? Then tell me your name, at least!" cried Marjory, her heart beginning to beat loud with wonder and excitement.

"No, Miss Heriot, I'll no tell you my name."

"Do you know you are very rude, very uncivil?" cried Marjory, stepping back with a flush on her face.

"Maybe!" said the other, recovering her self-possession, which had been momentarily impaired. "I'm no a good judge what's civil and what is uncivil; but I'll no tell you my name—nor anything about me; unless it is true."

And with these words the stranger walked away,

not pausing to hear what Marjory had to say. This meeting had a painful effect upon her. She pondered over it for the next few nights and days, wondering, with a bewildered sense that her wonder was vain, what it could mean. If what was true? or what did it, what could it matter to the Heriots whether something known to this girl was true or not? She tried to scorn it, as some vulgar bugbear, probably concerning something quite unimportant; but she could not succeed. What was it? she kept saying to herself. She could not mention it to her uncle; she could not confide anything so serious to little Milly. What could it be? And the more a mystery of this kind, however petty, is kept to its original possessor, the more it vexes the mind, and becomes a daily annoyance. If Fanshawe had but been there! Him she could have consulted; with him she could have talked it over, and wondered aloud, and received strength from the wonderings of another. Probably between them, they might have come to some reasonable conclusion, to some explanation of the mystery. She was almost half-tempted to write to him, as the only person who knew about Isabell's letter, the only one who could understand what she meant. Almost, but not quite; a hundred reasons of womanly reluctance, shyness, disinclination to avow her dependence on the opinion of another, came in to prevent the imprudence; but yet it was something strange in Marjory's history, something new in her mind, that such an idea should have arisen in her. She quenched it with a certain shame.

And oddly enough, one of these days, Mr. Charles brought home a friend with him to dinner, who knew Fanshawe. I do not pretend to disclose exactly the sentiments which moved Mr. Charles. Miss Jean's advice had never quite gone out of his mind. He was of the kind of man to whom an injunction, of whatever character, carries weight, and who feels that when a charge of any sort is laid upon him, whether accepted or not, it becomes a duty, and must be fulfilled. His good sense and his feeling of propriety struggled vainly against the prejudice of doing what he had been told. Instinctively, he looked about the links for men who were worthy of being introduced to Marjory. He made a little mental cross against the names of those who were specially endowed by any of the gifts of Providence, who were handsome, or wealthy, or well-spoken of. "Would So-and-So please her, I wonder?" the old man said to himself, with a comical terror of the older woman, who had given him this commission; and with a faltering heart he had obeyed her behest, and under the most transparent pretence of accidentalness, had already taken home with him two or three of the best men he could find. On such occasions, Mr. Charles did his best to look perfectly innocent and at his ease. He made in private many and voluble apologies to Marjory.

"I sometimes feel the want of a little conversation, my dear. Not but what I am perfectly happy in you, that are a far better talker than most folk. But a little change, you know; and it is good for you, too, Marjory. You may think not, and even

you may not care for it at the moment; but depend upon it, it is good for you. It's a break upon the monotony. It prevents you from falling out of the way of society. And I know you are too good a housekeeper, May, ever to be taken unawares in respect of the dinner."

"You mean you are too particular about good eating to make it possible," said Marjory, smiling. "But, Uncle Charles, of course you must see your friends when you please. You do not require to make excuses to me."

"It is not that, not quite that, my dear," said Mr. Charles, perplexed, not knowing how to avow that he would gladly have done without those friends; and the same little epilogue had been performed several times without the least apparent effect produced either upon Marjory or the eligible persons thus brought to see her. Marjory, perhaps, was somewhat disposed to retreat into her mourning on these occasions. She was perfectly civil and friendly to her uncle's friends; but she kept them in that category, and never allowed them to become her own; and as Miss Jean had made the express condition that Mr. Charles was to interfere only so far as the first step was concerned, the poor man was still more confused and perplexed by the utter failure of his expedient. He had no head for such delicate negotiations; he never asked the same person a second time, nor took any steps to promote intimacy. That was not in his instructions. However, for once he did succeed in rousing Marjory to energy at last. The guest who knew Fanshawe was a Scotch squire,

who had been a friend of Tom's, and whom Marjory, too, had known in former days. There were reasons for inviting him of a perfectly feasible character, and which required no apologies from Mr. Charles.

"I've brought Walter Seton to see you; we'll give him some dinner," he said, as he knocked at the door of Marjory's dressing-room, without thinking it necessary to apologize; and Marjory was more open, more friendly than usual to the old friend. It was not till after dinner that the conversation took place which moved her out of her friendly calm. Milly had come in, as the fashion of the house was, and taken her place by her sister's side. It had been the old fashion in the days when Milly was the light of her father's eyes. The little girl's chair was drawn as close to Marjory's as the conditions of chairs would permit. She stole her hand into her sister's under the table. Milly, indeed, had no independent being when Marjory was by. She was a bloom growing on the stem of the elder flower.

"I hear you had Fanshawe at Pitcomlie," said Mr. Seton, with complacent calmness, and without a suspicion that he was about to make himself intensely disagreeable. "Is he any steadier than he was, I wonder? You had him for some time at Pitcomlie? Somebody told me he was on a long visit."

"Ah, yes. We had him for a week or two. Is he not steady, then?" asked Mr. Charles.

Marjory had pricked up her ears, and so did little Milly, to whom Fanshawe was an example of everything admirable in man.

"Well," said the other, shrugging his shoulders, "I know nothing bad of him; but he's a sad unsettled fellow; amiable, and all that, but, I fear, a good-for-nothing—a ne'er-do-well, as we say in Scotland. It is odd how many agreeable men belong to that species. For he's a nice fellow, a pleasant fellow. Didn't you think so, Miss Heriot? All ladies do."

"He was good for a great deal when he was at Pitcomlie," said Marjory, feeling her cheek flush in spite of herself. "A kinder friend never appeared in a melancholy house."

"He was all that—all that," said Mr. Charles, hastily.

"That is exactly what I should have expected to hear," said Seton. "You have hit off his character in a word. Ready to do anything for anybody; always serviceable; good for other people's concerns, but letting his own, you know, go to the dogs. When I said good-for-nothing, I ought to have said good for everybody but himself."

"That's a fatal kind of amiability," said Mr. Charles, falling into this depreciatory estimate with a readiness which disgusted the two feminine partizans, to whom it was impossible to see their friend assailed without striking a blow in his defence. "I have known many men like that, nobody's enemy but their own—"

"I think you would speak a little more warmly, Uncle Charles," said Marjory, with a burst of which she was herself ashamed, "if you remembered all that Mr. Fanshawe did for us. Amiability does not

make a man do what he did. Have you forgotten poor Tom's bedside? and all his kindness to my father, and after—I beg your pardon; it is bad taste to introduce our private matters. But, Mr. Seton, I should be a wretch if I allowed anyone to speak disparagingly of Mr. Fanshawe without telling what I know."

"Yes, yes; I quite understand," said Seton, with a suppressed smile. "Ladies always give him that character. He is the most serviceable fellow. But I speak of his own concerns; he is a very unsatisfactory man to have anything to do with in business, for example. He is as ignorant as a woman —begging your pardon again, Miss Heriot. He is a nice fellow, but thoroughly unsatisfactory; as unsettled as a man can be; a complete rover, here to-day and gone to-morrow. I like him very much myself. I don't know any pleasanter companion; but that's his character. Socially, of course, it doesn't matter; but it's a great pity for himself."

"No doubt about that," said Mr. Charles; "a great pity. What are his means, now? That would be a kind of a way of judging."

"I do not see that we are the people who ought to judge him," said Marjory, rising from the table; while little Milly, with all her golden locks on end, holding by her sister's dress, and turning looks of fire and flame upon the calumniator, rose too, in a flush of childish fury.

"Oh! how I would have liked to have done something to him!" cried Milly, as soon as they had got to the safe shelter of the drawing-room. "If I

had been a man, I would have fought him, May! Our Mr. Fanshawe, that is good for everything! I hope Uncle Charles will never, never as long as I live, bring that man here again!"

"I hope so, too, Milly," said Marjory, breathing quick in her suppressed excitement; and she seated herself at the deep window overlooking the Cathedral ruins and the sea beyond, with her arm round her little sister. Milly's hair spread over their black dresses like sprinkled gold; Milly's little heart beat against the bosom in which another heart was beating still more warmly; with indignation—only with indignation, and generous resistance to wrong.

It was the longest day of the year. What lingering silvery light, what soft tints of pale celestial colour, what opal radiance of enchanted hours that are neither day nor night, is involved in that description! I do not know what these evenings may be in the region of the midnight sun; but they cannot possess such mystic, poetic light as do the long Summer nights in Scotland, too poetic for any weird glory of unnatural shining. The young woman and the child sat enshrined in this visionary radiance long after Milly ought (I allow) to have been in bed. Mr. Seton had an engagement at the Club, and did not, fortunately, return to the drawing-room. His presence would not have been appreciated there.

CHAPTER VII.

It was according to all the rules of that condition into which Marjory was gliding unawares that next morning she should receive another letter from Fanshawe, which, however, was not the second nor the third. The incident had lost all its novelty, and become common enough in her experience. And there could be little doubt that these letters conveyed to her, with all the subtle difference which exists between a man's self-accusations and the censures of another man, very much the same tale which had been told by the visitor of last night. Fanshawe allowed in so many words that he was good-for-nothing; he told her in covert language, but still plain enough, that he had been roused by meeting her into thoughts of, and dreams after, better things. But he did not tell her what better thing he was doing, what attempt he was making to attain a career worthy of a man. And probably had she been able to see him as he was at that moment, dropped back into all his old habits, occupied with his old busy round of idleness, and keeping up just enough of his nobler discontent as found utterance in his letters to her, Marjory would have felt with a pang that Seton was right and she herself wrong. She had a vague uneasy feeling to this effect, even while she read the unintentionally decep-

tive and skilful sentences by which he appealed to her sympathy, and by which he secured that sympathy, notwithstanding the sense of something unreal which floated vaguely over the surface as it were, stopping her in the full course of interest and belief. She said to herself uneasily, why does he not do something? or why, if he cannot do anything, should he lament over it? Had he been silent, Marjory would not have thought upon the subject; but Fanshawe, who knew no other means by which to recommend himself to her, unconsciously followed Mr. Seton's lead. He abased himself, hoping to be exalted. He mourned over his uselessness, expecting her to receive these lamentations as virtue. And Marjory indeed, though she faintly perceived a certain hollowness in the lamentations, did accept them as such. She took a rapid survey of the position, and asked herself, if it was all true, wherein he was inferior to other men? Seton, who had accused him, how was he better? He had an estate to look after, which gave him a certain anchor, and object in life; "and I have no doubt he manages it very badly," Marjory said to herself, with a certain spitefulness. And her uncle, for example, who had given up Fanshawe's cause, and had shaken his head over the idea that he was nobody's enemy but his own, of what practical use was his life that he should shake his head at another man? Marjory grew hot upon this subject in her private thoughts. The Pitcomlie papers, the portfolios of prints, and the golf at St. Andrews! Did these serious occupations give one man a right

to erect himself in superiority as fulfilling all the duties of life over another? Marjory walked down to the Links in her fervour, and watched all the men going out for their game. Some of them were hardworking men taking their relaxation; but a great many of them were gentlemen living at home at ease, and considering, as we have before said, that two rounds of the Links was the whole duty of man. A meritorious individual who had won his game before luncheon, came sailing up to her with satisfaction beaming from every wrinkle. He had no sense of being a useless member of society; but probably he would shake his head at Fanshawe, who played no golf, and who could be, when occasion served, the truest, most self-denying of friends. Nobody's enemy but his own! And whose enemies, then, were the busy groups on the Links? extremely busy—at what? Such were Marjory's bitter feminine thoughts—thoughts which probably would never have crossed her mind had they not been provoked by injudicious criticism.

"I have not time to speak to you, May," said Mr. Charles, waving his hand to her. "I am engaged for a foursome; and if I am late for dinner you must not be surprised, for I am very busy today."

"Oh, very busy, I see," cried Marjory, "and most usefully employed, uncle."

"Yes, my dear, there is nothing in the world so good for the health," he said, hurrying off with his long legs, and a countenance of the utmost importance and seriousness. And it was he who had

said of Fanshawe that he was nobody's enemy but his own!

Little Milly was golfing too, at the Ladies' Links, whither some youthful companions had beguiled her from her constant clinging to her sister's side. "But I'll come with you directly, May, if you want me," cried youthful Milly, ready to throw down her club at a moment's notice. What a pretty sight it was!—groups of pretty girls (the girls are all pretty in St. Andrews) in the picturesque dresses of the period, looped up at every available corner, with bright flying ribbons, bright-coloured petticoats, a patch-work of brilliant colours—and such quantities of bright locks ruffled by the breeze, as might have set up a hair-market on the spot—were scattered in knots of two or three over the smooth slippery velvet of the grass. Across the burn on the other side, were the darker groups of the men, relieved by, here and there, a red coat. Yellow heaps of sand, upturned by the sea, which was little seen but much heard, and great rough whin-bushes scattered about the "bent," or rougher edge of the Links, with a background of blue hills, and enough trees to swear by on one side—and on the other St. Andrews, on its headland, the sun shining full upon it, upon its grey towers and white houses, and the stretch of sea which filled in the landscape. The prettiest scene! Marjory was half softened by it, yet turned away with a certain scorn that did not belong to her nature. These were the people who found Fanshawe a good-for-nothing, nobody's enemy but his own!

She made a long course to the Spindle after this, and I avow that it was a long walk for a young lady alone; but then she was in a condition in which our own thoughts are our best companions; and she liked the soft silence, the long meditative walk, the murmur of the sea. The day was fine, and shone with that pathetic brightness which a Scotch summer day so often has after a storm—as if Nature made anxious amends to her children for those frequent interruptions which she could not prevent. The sea was full, washing up to the very foot of the grey fantastic rock. Little blue wavelets, fairy curls of foam, crept about it, as if trying to soften the silent giant. They came up in little child-like rushes, as of glee irrepressible, to the very edge of the mossy grass; and Marjory had not been long there before she perceived the girl in whom she had been so much interested, wrapped in a shawl, and seated in her former place before the door of the cottage. An old woman, with the old "mutch," bound with a black ribbon, which has almost fallen out of use in Scotland, stood in the doorway. She had just placed a pillow to support the sick girl, and was looking at her wistfully, with an evident love, which had seriousness, and even severity, in it. Marjory went up to her with some eagerness. She was welcomed with a smile from the girl, who rose faltering in her pleasure. "Eh! but I'm glad to see you!" she cried; then dropped into her chair, too weak to stand. She seemed to Marjory to look even feebler than on the previous day.

"Good day!" said Marjory, addressing the old

woman at the door; "I am afraid she is very weak; has the storm harmed her? and will you let me ask if she has the wine and strengthening food she requires? I beg your pardon if I am taking a liberty."

Scotch cottagers are not always to be depended on in such particulars. Marjory knew that she might be speaking to some one as proud as a grand-duchess, though arrayed in an ancient mutch.

"I thank ye kindly, mem," said the old woman, "we need nothing; but it was a kind thought. Na, she's wanting for nothing, nothing; except an easy conscience, and the comfort of them that tell the truth."

"Poor child," said Marjory; "I am sure she tells the truth."

"And that I do!" said the girl. "Oh, leddy, you said God never misunderstood; bless you for that; but whiles the best in this world do, and the kindest — Oh, mother, dinna speak. This lady's heart speaks for me; she does not blame me. Tell her nothing but what I tell her. And if you would be real good and kind, mother dear, let me speak to her in peace."

"I'll do that!" said the mother, with a movement of anger; but in another moment she called Marjory aside with a sudden gesture, and whispered to her. "This lass," she said, solemnly, "God help her; she'll never be better; she's my youngest, and she dying before my very ein. But she's dying with something on her conscience; she tells me one story, and this horrible world believes another. She's taken a great fancy to you. Oh, my bonnie

leddy, take pity upon a poor family that's heart-broken; bid her no go down to the grave with a lie in her right hand. I'll forgive all the meesery and the shame if she'll tell the truth."

Tears were glittering in the woman's eyes; tears which did not fall, but moistened the eyelids with a painful dew—though the eyes were red, as if they had wept much.

"If I were in your place I would believe her," said Marjory. "Did she ever tell you lies before?"

"Never, never! never till now!" cried the mother; and two tears fell on the apron which she raised to her eyes hastily; but she added: "She never had any occasion; she never did a thing to be ashamed of—my poor, poor bairn!—till now."

"I would believe her now," said Marjory, who thus suddenly found herself involved in a family tragedy. The girl was looking uneasily towards her; the mother shook her head.

"Oh, if I could!" she said; "but go to her, go to her, my bonny leddy; and if you would speak a word!"

Marjory seated herself on the grass by the invalid's feet; she was beginning to say something about the storm, and the interruption of her walks, but the sick girl was too much interested in subjects more important. She looked down upon the young lady with a sickening anxiety in her pathetic eyes. "Did she say anything?—anything to make ye leave me—anything to turn your heart?" she said, wistfully taking hold of Marjory's dress.

"Nothing!" said Marjory. "She said you had something on your conscience. My poor girl, I

believe all you said to me; but if you could relieve your mother by telling her anything you have not told her?"

"Oh! no, no!" cried the girl; "there is nothing I have not told her. It is all true—as true as the Holy Gospel. I would bear shame if I deserved it. I would na' shrink from my just recompense. I'm bearing it now, and falsely, and it's killing me; but the truth, and that alone, I will say."

Marjory looked up at her with a strong and yearning pity, which she herself scarcely understood. It seemed to her that she would like to take the matter in hand, and clear the truthfulness of this delicate ailing creature, who looked so shadowy and worn, and pale. Whatever her fault might be, it appeared hard to pursue her to the edge of the grave with reproaches, as her mother seemed doing. She was young enough to be forgiven, Marjory thought, almost whatever she had done; young enough to be pardoned for maintaining some fiction of self-defence, whatever it might be. So young—and yet so near, it seemed, to those gates of death which shut upon everything, making an end of all pretences. "Poor child!" Marjory said, unconsciously, as she looked at her. The sight of such a creature dropping slowly, visibly into the grave at her age, was enough to move a heart of stone, without any addition to the sadness of the sight.

"I am twenty," said the girl; "you think me younger than I am; and I've lived a long life, though I am not auld. I have had sad changes, hope and fear, and then a bit blink that was bright, bright,

and then darkness, darkness, wherever the eye could see. It is hard enough to bear that when your own folk stand by you; but when they are turned against ye—and dinna believe ye—"

"Does no one stand by you?" asked Marjory.

"My sister," said the girl. "She's good, good, better than anyone I ever knew. She has given up her place to be near me. She puts her trust in me —which is a great strength when you have to face doubt. Oh, if I could be sure I would live till it's all cleared up! But it would be hard, hard, to die before—though I can do that too—if the Lord will —But oh, seeing it's the triumph o' truth and right I'm wanting—seeing it's no for mysel, for I must die sooner or later—do you no think He's sure to grant it before I die?"

"I do not know what it is," said Marjory; and then feeling as if what she said was unkind and cold, she added quickly, "I hope you will live long, and see better days. You are so young—"

The girl shook her head. She held up her thin hand, interrupting the words. "I have no wish for length of days," she said. "Many a time I've wondered how it was that long life was made so much of in the very Bible itsel'. But that was in the old days, before our Lord's time, when folks knew little about it, or where they were going to. I mind, aye, a verse of a poem that runs in my head,

> " 'The saints are dead, the martyrs dead,
> And Mary, and our Lord, and I
> Would follow with humility.'

that's bonnie. Are you fond of poetry?"

"Yes," said Marjory, in her surprise.

"You wonder to hear me say it? but we aye liked reading at home—though maybe not the like of that—and there were many things that I tried to learn."

"I see that you have had a very different education from most girls," said Marjory, with a certain buzzing and confusion of wonder in her mind, which puzzled herself. Some curious broken lights seemed to glimmer into her thoughts. She could not tell what they were, or what they meant; but a sensation of pain came over her in the midst of her wonder, pain for which she was quite unable to account.

"No—no that," said the girl. "I liked it for itself, and so I tried; but oh, it's a' past now—a' past and ended. I read my Bible most. My mother says the other books put things in my head. And oh, what wonders and mysteries there are in the Bible, more than anything in the other books."

"But your sister always trusts you, and is good to you?" said Marjory. Her mind was disturbed, and her curiosity most warmly awakened. She would gladly have put some leading question to procure further information, but this seemed all that it was possible for her to say.

"Oh, ay, very good," cried the sufferer. And she wandered off into those religious speculations, founded upon strong and child-like faith, yet having the appearance of doubts and questionings, which are so familiar to young and gentle souls chiefly occupied with the other world and its concerns.

Marjory sat and listened, and interposed now and then a word. And thus a simple sad young soul unfolded itself before her, full of deep wonder, and pain, and sorrow, recognizing God's hand in all the events of earth, and longing for an explanation of them—as only the truest faith can long. The poor girl thought herself wicked in some of her questionings—she thought no one had ever entertained such theories before. She poured forth all her chaos of pious difficulty upon Marjory's ears, and it seemed to the hearer, who was so much more accustomed to the world, that these doubts and difficulties were more devout than anything she had ever heard in her life. As they thus sat, another woman, this time the mistress of the cottage, came out, and suggested that the invalid had been already long enough out of doors. She was an honest country-woman, with an anxious expression in her face, and she made signs apart to Marjory, begging her to wait. After the girl had gone in, which she did reluctantly, and with many entreaties to her new friend to come again, this good woman hurried after Marjory. She came up to her breathless, with heightened colour and anxious eyes. "Eh, mem, you're a real leddy, and real good to poor folk, it's easy to see that. I wanted to ask just one question. What do you think of her? I can see you'll tell me the truth."

"I am afraid she is very ill," said Marjory, gravely; "and very weak."

"Oh, it's no her health I'm thinking of. She's all that; but though Death is awful in a house, I'm no one that would put a dying creature to the door.

It's other things. We're decent folk—and never have had a clash or a story about one of us, as long as I can mind. Am I right in keeping the like of her in my house?"

"But why the like of her?" said Marjory. "She seems to me a little saint." She thought for the moment that the poor girl's most innocent "doubts" had affected, perhaps, some one of Scotland's rigidly orthodox critics, and that this was the result.

"Oh, dinna say it—dinna say that! I think so myself when I look at her, and when I hear her speak; but oh, mem, though she's very good in words—the thing I cannot get over is—that bairn."

"What bairn?" cried Marjory, aghast.

"Did they no tell you? I thought they would; for it's no right to let a leddy come without hearing. It's like deceiving a minister. Ay, mem, that's just it. Poor thing, she has had a bairn."

It would be impossible to tell the revulsion of feeling with which Marjory received this news. She gazed aghast at her questioner, she coloured as deeply as if she herself had been the guilty person, and finally she turned and fled homeward without reply. To such a question, what answer could be made.

"I cannot advise you, I cannot advise you!" she cried. She put her hands to her ears, that she might not hear more. She quickened her steps, stumbling over the grass. Was there then nothing in the world which could be accepted honestly, as pure and true, without horrors of questioning and investigation? When she had gone half the way,

Marjory sank down on the turf, and covered her face with her hands, and wept bitter tears of grief and mortification. Her very heart was sick. After all her new friend was nothing to her—the chance acquaintance of an hour—a girl in a totally different sphere, where such sins were differently thought of; and yet, this new disappointment seemed somehow to chime in with the irritation of the previous night. Perhaps it was her nerves which were affected. Pain and shame, and a sensation of wounded and outraged feeling, such as she had never known before, overwhelmed her being. Was there nothing real—nothing reliable—nothing to be trusted in this whole miserable, sinful world?

CHAPTER VIII.

MARJORY did not leave the house for some days. She was disgusted with everything. She had no heart to encounter the shining of the ceaseless sunshine out of doors, and the gay scenes upon the Links—gay yet sober, with a Northern brightness. They seemed to tantalise and mock her in the heaviness of her heart. And yet when she considered calmly (or tried to do so) she had so little foundation for this excessive and fantastic feeling. So far as Fanshawe went, she might never, she said to herself, see him again; and though of course she could not help having a certain feeling of friendship for him, considering the circumstances in which they had been drawn together, yet, after all, whether he was a good-for-nothing, or the most useful and admirable member of society, it mattered very little to Marjory. And in so far as respected this unknown girl, it mattered less still—it mattered absolutely nothing. Marjory knew, as all who know the peasant population of Scotland are compelled to admit, however reluctantly, that deviations of such a kind are unfortunately much too common, and in general much too leniently judged. Such painful incidents of rural life had come in her way before, and shocked and disturbed her without having this paralyzing and sickening effect. Why

was it? Was it her nerves, her bodily health, one of those simple physical reasons which disagreeable philosophers represent as at the bottom of all our supposed moral sentiments? This was an explanation which Marjory hated and scorned, as was natural, and which vexed her already wounded mind all the more that she could not absolutely put it out of the question. It might be that suffering and exhaustion had given to events, which would have affected her little under other circumstances, a special power to sting. She had to account for her gloom to her uncle by a headache, that most plausible excuse for all unrevealable griefs, and she overcame Milly by a quick prayer for silence—

"Never mind me, dear," she said. "I am worried; my head aches—don't ask me any questions."

Obedient Milly asked no more, but she crept to her sister's side, and kept looking at her with wistful glances, which were more inquisitive than the questions themselves. Marjory was a person of too much importance to be allowed to be out of temper, or out of heart, with impunity.

"Your headache is lasting a long time, my dear," Mr. Charles said, after vainly suggesting "a turn on the Links" by way of remedy. "Don't you think it would be well to see the doctor?"

And Milly wept a few ready tears at the idea that May might be ill. Thus Marjory was compelled to give up her headache; but her heartache, which nobody knew of, was more difficult to get rid of. She went no more to the Spindle, but strayed listlessly along the country roads, which are not in-

teresting, and tried her best to forget all about an encounter which had interested her so much at first, and had wounded her so unduly. Both the interest and the vexation were, she felt, excessive—a trick of the nerves, a weakness of the body, a tendency to emotion, produced by the strain she had sustained for so long.

A whole week had elapsed in this way, when one day she was told that a woman wanted to see her; "a decent woman, but a poor body," was the description of the maid. Marjory went down to the court to see this visitor, expecting some applicant from the poor quarter of the town, or other petitioner. She was surprised and excited to see that it was the woman who had caused her so much vexation, the mistress of the cottage at the Spindle, who stood with an anxious face, expecting her approach.

"Oh, mem," she cried, almost as soon as Marjory came in sight. "Come back, come back, and see yon poor lass! She's breaking her heart. She's been worse than ever, crying for you night and day, and since she heard that I had tell't ye, she's had no peace in her mind. All her cry is, 'Bring back the leddy, bring back the leddy! I canna die till I've seen the leddy.' We've tried to pacify her a' we could. We've said nae doubt you were gane away; folk come to St. Andrews for the sea-bathing, and then they go away; or we said nae doubt the leddy finds it's ower long a walk; but naething would content her; and at last I came away, seeing it was my fault, to try if I could find you. And

oh, mem, maybe I was hard-hearted yon day. We mauna be unforgiving. She's but a bairn, so to speak, and it was a gentleman that deluded her with his flattering tongue. When it's a gentleman it's a' the harder on a poor lass; and they have such deceiving ways. When I was young myself, there was a student lad, a minister's son, no less——"

"What does she want with me?" said Marjory, coldly.

"Oh, mem, how can I tell ye? whiles a poor creature like that will take a yearning; it may be for one thing, it may be for another. Sometimes it's for meat and drink; but this poor thing is no of that kind. You've spoken to her soft and kindly, as I dinna doubt is your nature, and she canna bide that you should think ill of her."

"How can I do other than think ill of her," said Marjory, "after what you said?"

"Well, mem, I canna tell. You maun hear her story; one says one thing, and another another. I canna tell the rights of it; but this I maun say that she's no just a common lass. If there are any excuses that a lady like you would think excuses, you may be sure she has them; and it would break a heart of stone to see her there, whiles in her bed, whiles on her chair, greeting and praying, 'Oh, bring the leddy back!' I canna stand it, mem," said the woman, wiping her eyes, "I canna stand it, and if you saw her, neither could you."

Then a curious sensation came over the proud young lady, who had been so deeply disgusted. It was as if some frozen spring in her had suddenly

melted; her whole heart seemed to give way. A kind of yearning desire to obey the call thus made upon her, overcame all other feelings in her mind. She made a brief, ineffectual stand against this flood of unaccountable emotion.

"I do not see what good I can do her," she said. "I have no right to judge her, and I don't judge her; but what can I do? If I can help her in any way, you have only to tell me; but I, whom she scarcely knows, who know nothing of her, why should I go to her? What good could I do?"

"Na, mem," said the woman earnestly, "that's mair than I can tell. It's just a fancy. I'm no saying it's more than a fancy; but ah, you ken yourself, sometimes all the world is no so much good to us as just something we have wished for and wanted; some bit thing that was nae solid advantage. Oh! if you would but come! You're a leddy well kent and much thought o', that can take no harm. It could not harm you; and oh! the comfort it would be to her!"

"Did you know me?" said Marjory, not knowing how to delay a little longer, and to make a last effort to stifle the melting of the heart in her own breast; "or did she know me? How did you trace me here?"

"Poor thing, she knows nobody," said the woman; "and neither did I ken ye, mem. I ken few strangers. I found ye out by your description. I spoke to a friend of mine, a fisher's wife, that comes whiles with her creel to the door; and as soon as she had heard me out, she said, 'Unless I'm sair

mista'en, I ken the young leddy;' and, sure enough, she brought me to this door; but now I ken ye, Miss Heriot. My man has a cousin that lives at Comlie, and mony a time I've heard of the Laird's family. Oh! Miss Heriot, come out with me! She's in her bed, yon poor lass. Come and give her a little life, and hear her story. The sight of her would melt a heart of stone."

Marjory's was not a heart of stone, and it pled with her, more strongly than did this intercessor. She had seen the girl only three or four times, and had spoken to her but twice; though that had been enough to rouse in her a vague but powerful sentiment, for which she felt there was no adequate foundation. Now, however, this sentiment rose into a certain passionate force; she dismissed her visitor with a vague promise to go some time or other; but the moment the woman was gone, the pleading voice within awoke with double force, and gave her no rest. It interfered with her inevitable duties; it made her silent and preoccupied, unable to respond to her little sister's constant questions, and the remarks of Mr. Charles, who chose to come home for luncheon upon that day of all others, and was full of the doings of the new ladies at Pitcomlie, whom somebody he had met had been telling him doleful stories about. Mr. Charles's brow was puckered with anxiety, and his niece did not give him the sympathy he hoped for. "I do not know what is to come of the old house, or what I can do," he cried. "No doubt I am joint guardian; but how I am to fight against these two young women, or

keep them from having their way—it's a position I never anticipated, never anticipated, May."

"No doubt." She was thinking she heard the cry "bring back the leddy!" and Matilda and her sister had no interest for Marjory, even though they were turning upside down her father's house.

"For you see," said Mr. Charles, with his perplexed look; "though I am joint guardian, so is she; and you may say what you please, May, when it comes to be judged between two people, and one of them a pretty young woman, there's no tribunal yet invented that will hold the scales of justice altogether even. I might do the best for the boy and his inheritance; but she's his mother, and has nature on her side. The claims of nature might not tell so much if she were not bonnie; but the two together are irresistible. I do not know if I have your attention—"

"Oh yes, uncle!" said Marjory. But she was not, in reality, paying any attention. Her mind was away, speeding along the coast towards the Spindle Rock, and the lowly cottage under its shadow. Mr. Charles went back to his golf somewhat disappointed at the want of interest with which his plaints had been heard, and with a secret uneasiness in his mind as to the cause of Marjory's abstraction. He ran over all the list of men whom he had asked to dinner, in the accidental manner suggested by Miss Jean, with an anxious self-inquiry whether any of them might have to do with it. The idea was not a pleasant one. He had obeyed the old woman's suggestion because he could not help

himself, and with a secret certainty that nothing would come of it; but the thought that something might come of it was not agreeable. It confused him in his playing that afternoon; he made such a failure on the putting green as had not been known to be made by an experienced player for many a day, and covered himself with confusion. "It's all these young women," Mr. Charles said to himself ruefully; as, indeed, many another man has felt, if not said.

"May I come with you, May?" said little Milly wistfully. This was another difficulty to be got over. "I never go with you now; and at Pitcomlie I never was away from you."

"At Pitcomlie there were no links," said Marjory, smiling; and with a promise to walk with her in the evening, she disposed of her little sister. The afternoon sunshine was blazing over the coast when she set out finally on her long walk. A whole fleet of red-sailed fishing-boats were out at sea, and dropping forth from the sheltered embrace of the little harbour; a brisk little wind was blowing from the west, a genial breeze which never disturbs the Firth, or brings up foaming waters in the bay. The sun shone with that soft and tempered light which rejoices the heart, without affecting unpleasantly the physical frame. Marjory hastened on, tracing the turnings of the coast, ascending and descending, now on the crest of the cliffs, now at their feet. She had no eyes for the landscape, no ear for the soft splash and murmur of the waves; her heart beat with anticipations for which it was impossible to

give, even in imagination, any reasonable motive. Nothing that she could hear could affect her personally, and yet the emotion which possessed her was too strong to be entirely sympathetic. She said to herself that it must be some tale of pathetic shame for sin at the best, which awaited her; some story which might rouse her pity, but which would probably repel and disgust her at the same time. What better could she look for? But she hastened as if to hear news of the greatest personal importance, with a thrill in her veins, and a quite unusual palpitation in her heart.

Just before she came in sight of the Spindle, a very unlooked-for encounter happened to Marjory; she had heard steps following her for some time, but was too much pre-occupied to notice them; nor was it until she heard a voice from behind addressing her that she thought at all on the subject. When she heard herself called, she turned round hastily, and to her great surprise found herself face to face with the young woman whom she had seen at Pitcomlie, and at the family burying-place. Her aspect, however, was changed; she it was now who accosted Marjory; and there was an amount of anxiety in her round face which changed its expression entirely; she kept calling, as if this anxiety had excited her beyond all ordinary habits of self-control. "Miss Heriot, Miss Heriot!" she cried, as she came forward, stumbling among the whin-bushes in her excitement. "Where are you going, where are you going?" A certain sharp sense of amusement, mingled with anger, a perception of the ludicrous

inappropriateness of the question, as addressed to herself by a person who had steadily refused to afford her any information as to her own movements, struck Marjory, amid all her impatience. She smiled as she turned round, and waited for a moment, in answer to the urgent appeal.

"Where am I going?" she said.

"Ay, Miss Heriot, where are you going? You may think I've nae right to ask!" cried the girl, breathless; "but you're a leddy, and I'm but an ignorant lass. Maybe I have something to hide, but you have nothing. Oh, for the sake o' a' that's merciful, tell me! it's straightforward and simple to you, but no' to me. You're going for your diversion, or for kindness, or for I kenna what; but me, I'm travailing and working for life and death; for the life or death of a poor sorrowful creature that's perishing of grief and shame, and has done nothing, nothing to be so sore punished!" she cried, with sudden tears.

Marjory had stopped, arrested, in spite of herself, by the passion in the girl's voice. Her heart softened unawares towards this penitent opponent, who had refused all explanation on her own part, and yet demanded it with such confidence. "I am going to the cottage at the Spindle," she said. "You have no right to ask, nor to interfere; but I tell you because you are in trouble; because you seem to think I have something to do with it."

"No!" said the girl, pausing in her breathless course; "no you; but them that belong to you. Oh, dinna be angry, dinna upbraid me! It maun be

God that's brought you here. When I heard of the leddy, something told me it was you; but I wouldna believe it. I wanted to do a', a' mysel'; to bring her up from the gates o' the grave, to give her back her good name, to be her Saviour in this world. Eh, the Lord's hard upon us whiles! He'll let you do all the foolishness you please; but if there's one great thing, one good thing that ye would like to do, and then die—oh me, oh me! He brings in other folk; when your heart's full of hope, and ye see your way clear before ye—He brings in other folk!"

Here she sat down and covered her face and wept. That these tears sprung from some disappointment connected with herself, Marjory divined, though she could not understand how this could be. She stood by for some time, respecting the strong emotion which she did not understand. At last, however, she went up to her, and laid her hand softly on the young woman's shoulder.

"If I am to help you in anything," she said, with a sudden inspiration, as unaccountable to herself as all the rest, "do not stop and cry, and lose precious time; but come, like a brave girl, as I am sure you are, and show me the way."

"I will!" cried the girl, springing suddenly to her feet. "I will! there is enough for both you and me."

The cottage door stood half open; everything was still about; there was at first no one to be seen. A lonely place, musical with ripple of waves, with soft sough of the quiet winds, with those mys-

terious breathings of nature which make for themselves a language in solitary places. The two anxious and excited human creatures, one full of a sorrow and enthusiasm which had taken possession of her whole being—the other almost as much excited with that suspense of uncertainty, curiosity, and wonder which is equally enthralling—brought their painful life into the stillness, like creatures of another sphere, dispersing the natural sentiment of the place.

"There is no one here," said Marjory, unawares; but her voice produced a strange echo, a low cry from the half open door, and immediately after the figure of the sick girl appeared, holding herself up by the door, and gazed out eagerly. Her face was suddenly suffused with colour and life as she saw them.

"Oh, come in! oh, come in!" she cried, with pathetic entreaty, tottering forward with extended hands. The other young woman brushed past Marjory without a word, and threw her arm round her sister.

"Bell, you'll kill yourself!" she cried.

"And what if I did?" said the other, softly; "if you will but let me tell the lady. I must tell the lady. Oh, come in, come in! do not pass by the door."

"I am coming," said Marjory; her heart strangely divided between sympathy and the involuntary repugnance which again made itself felt within her as she approached the girl who had "gone astray." It is hard for a delicate-minded woman, brought up in all feminine traditions, to overcome, without long

training and some strong motive, this involuntary shrinking. She followed the sisters into the cottage with a strong thrill of repulsion, which almost tempted her to turn her back upon the sufferer. But she restrained herself, and entered after them into the dim little room. The sick girl had been seated near the open door, in a chair with pillows. Here her sister placed her again, propping her up. She was breathless with her exertions, but, notwithstanding her weakness, kept her anxious eye fixed upon Marjory, with an anguish of eagerness which fascinated the other, and held her fast. When Marjory sat down by her, this anxious gaze somewhat softened; the terror went out of it; she looked at her more calmly, her eyes lingering on her face.

"You do not come near me to-day," she said. "You're kind, but I can see the difference. You have come for Christian duty, but no so soft, no so sweet as when you came last and knew nothing. Oh, lady! you've judged me in your heart, and it's no just. You have not waited to hear what I had to say."

"No," said Marjory, "that is true; but I don't judge you. It is not for me to judge you, or any one. I have been disappointed—but God knows your excuses; how can I know them? I am very sorry for you," Marjory added, sympathetic tears coming into her eyes as she saw the large drops that veiled the luminous dying brightness of the other's.

"Oh, my bonnie Bell," cried the other girl.

"Never heed her; they're all hard, hard, there's nobody that understands but me."

Bell did not make any answer. She fumbled with a black ribbon round her neck, pulling out slowly, with an effort which showed how great her weakness was, something which was hidden within her dress.

"I've never taken it from its place," she said, "because he put it there himself. He hung it round my neck, and he said, 'Some day, Isabell, some day I'll put it on your finger.' It's aye been there since. Why should I put it on my finger when he's no here to do it? Rings and ornaments are no for me. Oh, lady, your heart's moved! Agnes, she's saying something. My heart beats, and I canna hear."

"She's saying nothing but your name," said Agnes, almost harshly, watching with a keenness that lost not a gesture or motion of the lips, the proceedings of the visitor. And, indeed, all that Marjory felt able to say was a startled wondering repetition of the name, "Isabell, Isabell, Isabell!"

"Here it is," said the poor girl, panting with the effort, and holding out in the palm of her worn hand, with a piteous mingling of tears and pride, a ring attached to her ribbon. "Naebody has seen it till now. I've carried it next my heart. He was not the one, oh, he was never the one to bring shame on them he loved! I wasna his equal—him a gentleman that made the heart glad to see him, and me an ignorant creature that knew nothing. But I took his fancy. Oh, lady, maybe it's because

you are a lady and kind, that I think you're sometimes like him, the turns of your voice and the way you put your hands. I took his fancy. When you came and sat under the Spindle Rock, and saw me sitting at my door—some way, oh, mem," she cried, with a pathetic apology, "I took your fancy too!"

"Go on, go on!" cried Marjory.

But Isabell knew no reason for haste. She looked at the others wondering. They were excited, but she, poor soul, had ceased to be excited. A kind of pensive shadow of happiness stole over her as she traced out the story of her love, and sought that simple apology for her lover.

"I took your fancy too," she repeated, softly. "I watched, and watched, and wished you would speak, but it was you that came the first. That was just as he did; but men are no made like us. Yours was kindness, but his was love. Oh, lady, dinna hurry me; my heart's fluttering as if it would break forth; it's like a bird in my breast. I'm his marriet wife."

"Whose wife?" cried Marjory, rising up. She came forward in her excitement, her tall figure towering over the others. Her passion of anxiety and wonder took almost the form of anger. "Whose wife?" she repeated, involuntarily taking hold of the ring. "Is this all you have to make you so? Oh, woman, do not make me curse the dead in his grave! Is this all? Did he deceive you so?"

"What does she say—what does she say? Oh, my heart's fluttering! Was that all? I am his

marriet wife," cried the girl. "I am his marriet wife!"

Marjory turned her eager eyes to the other, breathless, unable to speak. Agnes had her arm round her sister, supporting her. She was defiant, as always, but somewhat subdued by the command in the eyes of the lady, whom she felt to be her rival.

"It was a private marriage," she said, hurriedly. "No the minister; poor folk are no like leddies. It wasna right, but it's nae shame. They were marriet —before witnesses. He took her, and she took him. It's a thing that's done among the like of us."

Marjory stood stupefied in the centre of the little dim room, faintly lighted by its green windows. It seemed to her that she could neither move nor speak. Was it a dream? or was it possible? Could it be? All her old thoughts at the reading of Tom's letter swept over her mind like a gust. If this was Isabell, then what was her real position? and what changes might be involved of which nobody had dreamed? Marjory's heart began to flutter like the sick girl's. A cloud of confusion seemed to float round her. She saw the others but dimly out of her hot excited eyes. Isabell—his wife! "God help us," she stammered, not knowing what she said. "I don't understand it—I don't understand it! Whose wife?"

Isabell raised her pathetic eyes, wondering and appealing, to her visitor's face. Agnes looked at her steadily with an uncommunicating defiance. The one knew nothing of the confusion in Marjory's

mind, but only felt with a painful anguish such as sometimes rends the hearts of the dying, that this sympathy which she longed for, had failed her—the other knew, and confronted the lady who was her rival, daring her to avoid the revelation which was impending, but altogether unconscious and incapable of comprehending Marjory's thoughts. Neither of them spoke. And in the moment everything that had happened during the last four months whirled through Marjory's brain, passed before her eyes like a panorama Poor Tom on his death-bed, playing with the something that he would and would not tell her—then in the last hurried scene of all believing he had told her, thanking God that he had done it. Oh! the pitifulness of that thanksgiving for a confession never made! Had he made it, where would this girl have been now? It might have been life to her instead of death, it might have saved the life of the old father who broke his heart for Tom. It might have—God knows what mazes of sudden fancy she plunged into;—then all in a moment, came back to find herself crouching down for support in her chair, holding by it, looking at Isabell's pale alarmed face through a darkness that slowly dispersed. "What has happened?" she heard herself saying as she came out of the darkness. She had not fainted nor fallen; but a mist had come about her, parting her from reality, and engrossing her faculties at the very moment when the secret she had sought so long looked at her out of her companions' eyes.

As Isabell's face, however, slowly appeared to

her out of that mist, and she saw the intense expression of suffering and anxiety in it, the weakness, every blue vein showing, the large circle round those too luminous eyes, the wistful look in which her whole soul was—Marjory's heart was touched so suddenly that one impulse swept all other feelings away.

"Poor Isabell, poor Isabell!" she said with a cry unawares. "He tried to tell me on his death-bed. It was not his wish to leave you so. He thought he had told me;" and with an effusion of pity and tenderness which overcame all doubt, she took the girl's wasted hands into her own.

Wonder overcast poor Isabell's face. She began to cry softly, overpowered by the sweetness of this accost, but not knowing what it meant. "Oh, did you know him?" she murmured. "Oh, weel I ken he meant no harm. Lady, lady, did you know my Mr. Heriot—my man, my dear, dear man?"

"Bell," cried Agnes, whispering in her ear. "Bell! it's Miss Heriot her very sel!"

That evening Marjory sent a hurried anxious note to Fanshawe, calling upon him to come and help her. She did it by a sudden impulse, carried away by feelings which she felt incapable of expressing to any one else. Him only she could confide in, he only could help her in the struggle that was to come.

CHAPTER IX.

In the meantime, the young women at Pitcomlie, as they were entitled by Mr. Charles, had been spending their time very agreeably. Verna had got the house well in hand. She had re-arranged everything. The very furniture had been changed from one room to another. "We must at once give the house a character," she said, "so that it may be seen to be your house, Matty, and not the old Heriots'. There are a great many old-fashioned things which must be cleared away. We must give it a character;" and she went about the rooms, pulling the furniture hither and thither. Verna, unfortunately, though she had zeal, had no knowledge; she thought the results of a modern upholsterer's work, spick and span new tables, chairs, and carpets, all ordered without consideration of expense, would produce something infinitely better than the present aspect of the room, which had been lived in, loved in, suffered in, for so many years, and had acquired a human character of sympathy which makes even wood and velvet poetical. She did not understand the old inlaid cabinets, which had been Marjory's pride, any more than she could understand that insane desire for "a view," which apparently had tempted "the old family" to open its windows so to the stormy sea.

"One cannot escape the sea at such a place as this," Verna said; "we must put up with it, though I don't care for it; but to turn all the windows that way, *on purpose*, when there is quite a pretty garden behind, and a sheltered corner, with flower-beds, and all that. I have written to Mr. Freestone, and he is coming down on Saturday to see about a new wing."

This talk was carried on for the advantage of young Hepburn, who had come, as he now did daily, to ask how the ladies were; and if he could do anything for them.

"A new wing!" he said; "but you will find that highly expensive, and the house has always been thought a large house."

"Always been thought!" said Verna, with some scorn. "By those who don't know what sort of a house my sister has set her heart upon. I do not think it a large house; but it is a very good sort of foundation to work upon. By the time Tommy is of age, he is sure to be Master of the Hounds, High Sheriff of the county, or, perhaps, even Lord-Lieutenant—for I suppose the Heriots are well known to be one of the best families in Fifeshire; and then, of course, he will require room to give balls and other entertainments; he will be very grateful to me, you may be certain. My plan is to pull down the old house—"

"To pull down the old house!" Hepburn repeated, in growing consternation.

"And to build on the additions there," Verna continued calmly. "I have it all in my head. Un-

fortunately, I can't draw very well, but I have made a kind of an elevation, as they call it. The end of the new wing will come just where the old tower does; and the new drawing-room, which will be fifty feet by forty, will look out upon the lime-tree avenue. It will be delightfully shady, and we can have the flower-beds close under the windows. Then upstairs we can have some new rooms; it will be a great improvement. The drawing-room here is not a bad room, but it is dingy; and so are the dining-room, and library. In short, I don't doubt it was very nice for the old people, Mr. Hepburn—the old gentleman, who, I suppose, never saw much society; but my sister is young, and, of course, will recover her spirits—"

"Do you think she will?" said the sympathetic Johnnie. "Are there not some gentle natures that mourn for ever?"

Verna looked at him with a doubtful glance, dubious for the moment whether she should help him to a little real insight into her sister's inclinations, or whether she should keep up the pathetic aspect of affairs. And it appeared to her that the latter was so very much the most advantageous mode of action, that, though the temptation to reveal the truth had come strongly upon her for a moment, she hastily repelled it. "Yes, indeed," she said, shaking her head; "that is very true; but, dear Mr. Hepburn, my sister is very young; we cannot expect that she will always be as she is now."

"Ah!" said Johnnie; "but we may hope, at

least—I mean, she can never be more perfect than with that sweet air of resignation; that look as of one whose existence has already passed into another world."

Oh, what a temptation it was for Verna to give him a little sketch—such as she could so well have done—of the real Matty! Anyone who has had to sit by and hear a fool elevated into a saint by some still more foolish worshipper, will understand her secret exasperation. But there were a great many things to be taken into consideration. In the first place, Matilda's melancholy aspect was much her best one—when she cried she did not require to talk and commit herself, as otherwise she must have done infallibly; and, in the second place, Verna knew that to attempt to keep her sister in subjection, without affording her the relief of a worshipper, was hopeless, and young Hepburn ranked high in her list of ways and means. She shook her head accordingly, subduing herself, and acquiesced in this noble picture of Matty; but added: "You must remember, Mr. Hepburn, how young she is; and even if she should not care for society for herself, she must, some time or other, see the advantage for her children. And we all have a taste for fine rooms and handsome furniture," Verna added, with a princely air. "It is a weakness, no doubt; but the Bassetts are all famed for it. Matilda will never be happy till she has given a character to the house."

All this would have been infinitely comic to any man who had not been captivated by Mrs.

Charles Heriot's afflicted beauty. But young Hepburn was like most people in that condition; he accepted, as the most dignified truth, what would have appeared the most transparent nonsense in other circumstances. He did more than this; he allowed Marjory's home and kingdom, in which he had worshipped her since ever he could remember, to be spoken of as "good enough for the old people," and acquiesced in the fact that the Bassetts required something more magnificent, and that the house must have a character given to it, before it could become a fit habitation for Mrs. Charles and her sister. He was not a fool, nor unfaithful to his traditions; he was a great lover of poetry, the most intellectual person, by a long way (except the Minister, whose intellect took, as was right and natural, a Biblical form,) in the neighbourhood of Comlie. Few men in the East Neuk were to be compared to him in the way of accomplishments and general cultivation; but yet he was guilty of this foolishness and meanness without in the least being aware of it—or, at least, with an uneasy consciousness which he would not permit himself to be aware of. And yet his heart was not false to the ideal which had been his highest vision of excellence all his life. Had he spoken of Marjory, it would still have been with enthusiasm — though with that servility, which is common to men in love, he allowed it to be necessary that Mrs. Charles should "give a character" to her house. When Mrs. Charles appeared, however, and he had the honour so often accorded to him of escorting her

round the garden (which Matilda, too, much preferred to the cliff) he made a gentle remonstrance against Verna's energetic measures.

"I hear that there are to be several changes," he said, timidly. "Miss Bassett has been telling me about a new wing."

"Yes," said Mrs. Charles. "That is Verna's way. She always likes to be pulling things about. I declare I think she was quite pleased to see that ugly old ruin, that she might pull it down and make everything tidy. It is a fancy she has."

"But—do you think the old house—ugly?" said Hepburn, still more timidly.

Mrs. Charles was leaning on his arm; she was looking up at him with those pretty blue eyes, into which tears were ready to come at a moment's notice—a sweet dependent creature, seeking support and sympathy. Johnnie Hepburn knew a great deal better on this point than she did. Had the old house of Pitcomlie been his, he would have worshipped every stone of it. He knew all its associations, historical and otherwise, to the family; but yet he dared go no further than to ask humbly whether she too thought it — ugly? His mental servility was such that, if Matilda had said "Yes," boldly, no doubt he would have acquiesced.

"Well, isn't it?" said Matilda, with a momentary feeling that she might be committing herself. "Verna thinks so, I'm sure. And then it is of no use; and what is the good of keeping an old place without a roof, or windows, or anything, full of rats, and I daresay snakes, and all sorts of creatures. That is

what I hate about ruins. I suppose there are no scorpions in this country?"

"No, nor snakes either," said Hepburn, relieved. "I see now why you dislike it. There is nothing of the kind indeed; and old Mr. Charles Heriot used to keep the ruins in capital order. The old house has so many associations, you know—to the family."

"Oh yes, to the old family, I daresay," said Matilda; "but I don't know anything about their mouldy old ancestors. Verna has such a pretty plan that she drew herself—a beautiful long drawing-room, with a nice range of windows opening into the garden, and those new ribbon flower-beds that are so pretty, just like the border of a shawl, close under them. You must see the plan. Verna has quite a genius for that sort of thing, and she says it would give such character to the house."

"But then Miss Bassett is not the lady of the house," said Hepburn. "She cannot feel as you do, who are the representative of the Heriots. Of course she does not care about the associations as you must do."

"Oh no; she can't do anything at all unless I like it," said Matilda, "of course. I let her do a great many things, because she likes fuss and bustle, and I don't. I let her manage the servants, and order the dinner, and all that. But of course it is only because she is my sister. She has no power over anything unless I say she may have it. Everybody must know that."

"It is like you," said Johnnie, admiringly, "to

put yourself aside so as to indulge your sister. It is exactly what one might expect from you; but perhaps in happier circumstances, when you feel a little more interest in these secondary matters——"

"Do you think she takes too much upon her?" asked Matilda, quickly. "Oh, you need not be afraid to speak! She is my sister, to be sure, but we have been separated so much, and I quite know Verna's faults. It is quite her way to take too much upon her. If you think she is setting herself up as the lady of the house, or anything like that, I shall put a stop to it at once."

This put Johnnie into an unfortunate position, for he could not allow it to be supposed that he was finding fault with Verna, or undermining her with her sister. He said hastily:

"Oh, no, I had no such meaning. I thought perhaps—if you were to exercise your own judgment you would be kind to the old house. We are fond of all traces of antiquity here; and I have a special love for those old gables, and the roofless walls, and narrow windows—"

"Ah!" said Mrs. Charles, archly, "we know why that is. Because you were so fond of the old family. And of course Marjory was devoted to all that old stuff."

"No, indeed!" said Hepburn, blushing and stumbling in his words; "indeed you misunderstand me. I admire the ruin for itself, and I like it for its associations, without— Of course I have the highest respect for Miss Heriot."

"Oh yes, indeed—the highest respect! I like

that!" said Mrs. Charles. "I wonder what Marjory would say if she heard you? Oh, yes, even if you did not blush and look so conscious, we have heard all about it, Mr. Hepburn. When is it to be? And I wonder if she likes you being here so much? If I were in her place I shouldn't, I tell you frankly. If I were in her place——"

"Pray don't speak so," cried poor Hepburn, really distressed. "I am not so fortunate as to be able to hope that Miss Heriot takes any interest in what I do. Very much the reverse. She has always been like the moon and the stars, quite above my sphere."

"Oh, you are a great deal too humble," said Matilda, quite excited with this congenial subject, "but you ought not to come here so much if you want to please Marjory. I am sure she hates *me*. That sort of superior solemn kind of woman always hates us little things. Perhaps because the gentlemen like us," Mrs. Charles added, with a momentary giggle. Then remembering her *rôle*, "Dear, dear," she said, with a sigh, "to think I should talk such nonsense! as if what gentlemen thought mattered any more to me."

Hepburn could not but press gently to his side the soft little hand that rested on his arm. How charming her simplicity was, her naturalness, the light-heartedness of her youth cropping up in spite of her grief!

"I hope, however," he said, "that you do not think us quite unworthy of consideration—for that would be hard, very hard upon us."

"Oh, no," said Matilda, "indeed I always say frankly that I like gentlemen's society much the best. Women are so jealous of you, and so nasty in their ways. I don't pretend to be very clever, but I do like to be with some one who is clever. And one feels at once the superiority when one hears gentlemen talk. It is so different from our chitter-chatter. Isn't it now? I like to have some one I can look up to," said the woman, who was a fool, looking up, with all the skill of her folly, into the face of the foolish young man who was intellectual. Oh, poor Johnnie! He had a dim notion in some corner of his mind that what she said was silly, and yet he was ready to fall down at her feet and worship her. The silliness quite achieved his downfall. He had been wavering, all but conquered; but now the final *coup* was given to him. He murmured something in sudden delirium, he did not quite know what. Neither did Matilda know what it was; but she knew that she might henceforward guide him at her pleasure through all the ways of imbecility. She had snatched him from Marjory, too, which was a great addition to the pleasure. Marjory was clever, and Verna was clever; but here was something they could not do.

The conversation was interrupted at this beatific moment by the appearance of Verna, important and full of business as usual.

"Dr. Murray is in the drawing-room," she said, "and you must come and see him, Matty. They are the first people that have done more than leave cards; and you would not see them when they

called last time. He is the clergyman. You must come now."

"Clergyman? I suppose you mean the Scotch Minister," said Matilda. "Why should I go? I have nothing to do with him. You don't suppose I shall go to his miserable old conventicle. Go and see him yourself, Verna. You understand that sort of people. I am engaged; am not I engaged, Mr. Hepburn?" she said, smiling upon her new slave. But Johnnie was not destitute of the prejudices of a man born in the East Neuk.

"Don't you think you could see him?" he asked with hesitation. "He is a man of some distinction. He is a very well-known man, and he was a great friend of Mr. Heriot's—"

"Oh, one never will hear an end of the old family," said Matilda, "but if he is such a great person I suppose I must go. I always thought a Scotch Minister was a kind of Dissenter—oh, do tell me, Mr. Hepburn!—just for the poor people, a sort of man that would not take the liberty of calling. I am so ignorant, don't be disgusted. I know I am silly; but I will pay such attention to what you say."

Johnnie led her in, and expounded to her how matters stood. He gave her a sketch of Scotch ecclesiastical history, which was quite brilliant, so eager was he to make himself understood; and Mrs. Charles clung to his arm, and looked up at him, and said "Yes!" with little notes of admiration. What a quick pupil she was! he thought. Needless to add that Matilda was just as wise at the end as

at the beginning, and, in short, paid not the slightest attention. It was thus that they entered the drawing-room. Verna followed closely behind. When Matilda appealed so sweetly to her companion, "Am not I engaged, Mr. Hepburn?" a thrill of alarm had passed through Verna's soul. Could it be possible that the word meant more than met the ear? Had the flirtation which Verna had encouraged, by way of diverting Matilda and keeping her occupied, already come to a serious issue? It was incredible. Charlie was not yet six months dead, poor fellow; but the sister, who knew Matty, was alarmed, and followed closely, with all her senses about her, watching and listening. A mixture of wonder, admiration, contempt, and partial envy, filled her mind. Nobody knew so well as she what Matilda was; to think that any man should be such a fool! Verna, it must be remembered, used very plain expressions. And yet she admired her sister for this one thing which she could do, and which Verna herself could not do. She admired, and wondered, and half envied. How did she do it? And how was it that other people could not do it? And oh! what a fool the man was!

CHAPTER X.

Mrs. Murray was standing in the middle of the drawing-room in a state of dismay. The change which had come over it was greater than the actual transformation. One soul had gone out of the place, and another, a totally different soul, had come in. I suppose if this could be done with our bodies, we should cease to recognise even those familiar garments of flesh and blood. The furniture was the same, the old walls were the same, and yet the place was different. The Minister had found on the table, spread out to invite attention, Verna's new plan, made out in very bright colours, which caught the eye—and was reading to his wife the words "new wing, on the site of old tower," with a tone of consternation impossible to reproduce. The good people had come with friendly meaning to do what they could for the two young strangers, whom they were sorry for as having been thus suddenly thrown into a new country without any knowledge of its habits and traditions.

"Depend upon it, my dear, it is chiefly *gaucherée*," Dr. Murray had said, with a very broad accent on the last syllable. "Half of what is called rudeness is just shyness—and so it must have been in this case."

The excellent Doctor said this as a compliment

to Mrs. Charles's beauty, which precluded the idea of impertinence on her part. Mrs. Murray had not seen Mrs. Charles, and therefore was unaffected by her beauty, but she accepted the suggestion as possible. Marjory was no doubt hasty, and Miss Jean crabbed, and very likely "the young women at Pitcomlie" were only *gauches*—not intentionally disagreeable. But when Matilda entered, leaning on young Hepburn's arm, Mrs. Murray was confounded. Johnnie Hepburn! he whose hopeless devotion to Marjory had been known over all the country—who had written verses under so thin a disguise that no one could possibly mistake it, to her, in the "Fifeshire Journal"—who had tormented all her friends with offers of service, and who finally had come here upon Marjory's business a messenger from her! Matilda did not relinquish his arm till she had reached the centre of the room, when she performed a curtsey to her guests.

"Excuse me if I put up my feet," she said, as she placed herself on a sofa. The Minister's wife could do nothing but sit and look at her, so entirely was she taken by surprise. Naturally it was Dr. Murray, as the most important person, who spoke first.

"I hope you have quite recovered from the fatigues of your journey, Mrs. Charles Heriot?" he said. "Sad as it was, and sore as this home-coming must have been, I hope you have now settled down. It is a favourable time of year for this part of the country, and I may say, under Providence, that it's a very good season. We have had more bright

weather than ordinary, and everything is looking very well. I hope you are beginning to like your new home?"

"Yes, I suppose it has been good weather for Scotland; but not at all like what we have been used to. I think sometimes I shall die of the cold," and she muffled herself closely in the shawl which she had thrown off on coming in, "and the children feel it so very much."

"Oh, but it's new life to the children, my dear! You'll soon find that," cried good Mrs. Murray, "though yours are very young to be sure. My eldest daughter's children have just come to the Manse, from the Bombay Presidency. Poor things, they were white enough and miserable enough when they came, but since then they have flourished every day."

"Oh, indeed," said Matilda, with a stare; "but my children have always been taken such care of; and they feel the cold very much."

As if our bairns were not well taken care of! Mrs. Murray said to herself, and she was wroth in her heart, and concluded that this was more than *gaucherée*, whatever the Doctor might say. The Doctor was not quite so easily discouraged.

"When you have been here a little longer," he said, "and have got used to our ways, you will find it a pleasant neighbourhood—a very pleasant neighbourhood. St. Andrews is not too far for a drive, and there are a great many very agreeable families—"

"Oh, I shall never care for the Fifeshire society.

They must be so stiff and so dry," said Matilda; "and then they are all such friends of the old family, and set against us—"

"My sister means," said Verna, "that people have not been very nice since we came. We have had a great many cards, but nobody has really paid us a visit, except yourselves."

"They would think she was seeing nobody," said Mrs. Murray, softly, "and very natural;" but once more the Doctor made himself the spokesman, drowning the gentle voice of his wife.

"I have always heard," he said, "that there was a natural stiffness about our Scotch manners; but Mrs. Charles may be assured, and I take it upon me to say so, though I'm not a rash man by nature, that all that will soon disappear before her face. I hope it was not impertinent to look at the plans on the table. They are, perhaps, for some house in England?"

"Oh, no, indeed, for this house," cried Verna, delighted. "This drawing-room, you see, is not much of a room, and that horrible old ruin close to us does so frighten my sister."

"Frighten her! why should it frighten her?" cried Mrs. Murray. "You're not meaning the old house?"

She turned to Hepburn with a look of dismayed inquiry, and he dared not say anything. How could he say a word that would cross that beautiful sensitive creature? but at the same time he had the fear of ridicule before him, and of the two people both looking at him, before whom he did not wish

to show how foolish he was. He compromised, and fell between two stools, as was natural.

"Mrs. Charles has taken a—repugnance to it. I have been telling her it was on a mistaken idea. Snakes and scorpions don't exist in ruins here. That is why she is nervous," faltered Hepburn.

"Oh you naughty Mr. Hepburn," cried Matilda; "you know you confessed you did not care a bit about the ruin, except for——. But I will not tell upon you—you confessed it was nothing but association; and as I never associated with anybody here——"

Dr. Murray was too much absorbed to notice this last speech; he was solemn, and not to be trifled with.

"Do you know, Madam," he said, "that this is a very serious thing you are thinking of doing, a very serious thing indeed. Father and son have preserved the old house of Pitcomlie as long as I can remember. It was habitable in my young days—"

"That's true," said Mrs. Murray. "When I came here a bride, the old Laird—not the late Mr. Heriot, but his father, who died soon after—led me on his own arm to the best room, that was over the great door. The old lady of Pitcomlie was dead, and he had no woman-person, except the servants, in his house. It was a very handsome room, and but for its old age it's that still; and I would do a great deal myself before I would see it pulled down."

"I assure you," said Verna, "there is no other way of doing—and then to us, as my sister says,

it has no associations; besides, it is not beautiful, and of no use; and it is there the new wing must be built."

"Does Mr. Charles know?" asked the Doctor solemnly.

"Oh, please don't talk of Mr. Charles!" cried Matilda, vaguely perceiving that her side was having the worst, and beginning to cry; "it reminds me so of my poor dear Charlie. I cannot bear to hear the name. Please call him old Mr. Heriot, or something. When I think how I am left alone to struggle with everything, and poor, poor dear Charlie, who never would let the wind blow upon me! Please don't talk of the old man by his name —please!"

Mrs. Murray's kind eyes were quite moistened by this appeal.

"No, my dear!" she said soothingly; "no, my dear! Well, well do I know the feeling; and when I mind that dear boy—what a fine fellow he was—just the age of my Robert! Many and many a time I have held him in my arms. Oh, my dear, I beg your pardon!" cried the kind old woman, rising—with the tears dropping from her eyes, to kiss the young widow on her sofa. Matilda did not know what compunctions were expressed in this caress; and, to tell the truth, she submitted with a very bad grace to the salute, which she rather thought was a piece of presumptuous familiarity on the part of the Minister's wife towards herself, a lady of property. The Doctor, however, this time resisted the beauty and the tears, and was less easily moved

than his wife proved herself. Beauty is a fine thing, and tears are touching; but an assault upon property—property which, to a certain extent, is national, the antiquities which give importance to a parish—is not to be permitted even on such considerations. Dr. Murray was alarmed. If this was done in the green tree, what would be done in the dry? The Heriots of Pitcomlie were the chief heritors in the parish; and what if they should take upon them to interfere with the church or churchyard?

"I am sorry," he said stiffly, "to have roused such very painful but natural feelings. I will endeavour to be more guarded again; but what I would ask is, does he—of whom we speak—know about this proceeding—or rather, I should say, this intention on your part? If he does not, I fear it would be my duty to tell him—"

"Could he do anything to us? he has no right," cried Verna, "to interfere."

"I hope he could; I hope he has!" said the Doctor. "He is joint guardian with the mother; and it will be my duty to let him know."

"I will not have old Mr. Heriot interfering!" cried Matilda. "He has nothing to do with us. Poor Charlie put him in his will only out of compliment—"

"Hush!" said Verna softly, giving her a look; "do you think really he would mind? Do you know I thought they would have been sure to do it themselves, but for money, or something? I hear that old Mr. Heriot was for ever paying his eldest son's

debts; and I thought, probably, that was the reason why the ruins were allowed to stand. But if you are sure he would object, why then I will put all the plans aside," said Verna magnanimously; "and wait until he comes."

"Why, Verna, your heart was set on it!" cried her sister.

"Not so much set on that as on keeping right with the other guardian, and keeping you right!" said the magnanimous Verna, whose eyes sparkled with resolution. Dr. Murray was somewhat stiff in his response, but still he was very laudatory; and Verna bowed and smiled, and accepted his praises.

"It is better in every way to take no rash step," said the Doctor; "if by any accident—which Heaven forbid—the lands should pass to another heir—"

"How could that be?" said Verna, suddenly turning pale to her very lips. It did not occur to her that the fragile lives of her little nephews were the slight threads that bound her to this kingdom, which she had been assuming should be hers for life. A sudden precipice seemed to open at her feet; she stood aghast for the moment, gazing at him with eyes dilating, and pale cheeks. Then she recovered herself, and said hastily, glancing at Matilda: "Ah, I understand! but you should not suggest such a thing before their mother;" and placed her hand upon her beating heart.

"It is a thing that must always be taken into consideration," said Dr. Murray. "You forget, my

dear young lady, that one in a succession is quite different from the possessor of independent property, which, perhaps, he has acquired for himself; he can alienate nothing, and he has no right to destroy anything. The next heir—"

"Oh, please," cried Verna, with unaffected alarm, raising her hands in an attitude of supplication; "don't make me unhappy with your next heir! I shall do nothing more—indeed I sha'n't—till Mr. Charles comes. It was not my sister; it was I who wanted it. Please, please don't say any more!"

But even after the visitors were gone, Verna could not shake off this uncomfortable impression. She went about all day with the words echoing through her head, and filling her with a hundred fancies. As it happened, both the children were ailing with some innocent baby-ailment. Verna went to look at them a dozen times in the course of the evening; she felt their foreheads and their pulses, and gave them their medicine with her own hands. Their father and uncle, both vigorous young men, had been cut off within a few weeks of each other; and why should these tiny children escape the dangers to which so many stronger people succumbed? The next heir! What loss, what misery and ruin, was in the suggestion! The poor little babies themselves and their mother seemed to Verna to have but a secondary part in it; but to herself, it would be destruction—an end of all her hopes—at once of the actual and of the ideal. She put the plans in the fire that very night

with heroic resolution, and blotted out from her mind those dreams of a great drawing-room, and even of a snug bed-chamber, sheltered from all the winds, in which she had indulged. These were glorious visions, but they were not worth the risking of her power and influence. She said to herself that she knew when to draw back, as well as when to advance, and spoke of them no more.

Meanwhile young Hepburn, much against his will, had felt that decorum bound him to take his departure when the Murrays did; and notwithstanding various signs from Matilda, propriety prevailed. He walked down towards Comlie with the Minister and his wife; and, as usual in such cases, his virtue was very indifferently rewarded.

"I hear you are a great deal at Pitcomlie, Mr. Hepburn," Mrs. Murray said, looking at him.

She had never addressed him so formally before. That painful attempt to convert Johnnie into John, which we have all of us made when the Johnnies of our acquaintance grew into men, had been her greatest effort hitherto; but now she looked him in the face with a disapproval which there could be no mistake about; and he felt the chill, being highly sympathetic and susceptible to all the risings and fallings of the spiritual thermometer.

"Yes," he said, uneasily; annoyed to find himself blush, and with a desperate attempt at carelessness. "Sometimes I can do little things for them; they don't know anybody, nor the ways of the country—"

"That is very well seen," said Mrs. Murray, with emphasis; "but Mrs. Charles is very pretty," she added; "a bonnie creature! and that goes further than anything else with some folk. Men are so easily led away," she went on, reflectively; "even my old Doctor, that is a very wise man in his generation, and should know better—"

"What are you saying about me, Mary?"

"I was saying you were wiser than most men, Doctor," said the Minister's wife, "and yet not so wise but what you are led away by a bonnie face, like other men."

"It is not, however, the bonnie face in this instance," said Hepburn, feeling his mind much lightened by being united with the Doctor in a broad and general accusation. "It is the sad position, the melancholy circumstances. To see so young a creature left solitary; arriving among strangers, with little children dependent on her, and no one to sustain her—"

Mrs. Murray was too tender-hearted to resist the pathos of this picture.

"And that's true!" she said; "that's true. Poor thing! She may be a little carried away by her new position; but I cannot think she's without feeling. No, she's not without feeling. What she said about old Mr. Charles was very true."

"That is all very well," said the Doctor; "but we cannot allow such proceedings as these young women contemplate—not if I had to appeal myself for an interdict to the Court of Session. An admirable specimen of old domestic architecture,

really in very good preservation, though the roof is gone in some places—and fully described in my account of the parish. No, no; it will never do. If you have any influence with them, John (the Doctor had never said Johnnie in his life), you should let them know seriously that this kind of thing is quite out of character—quite out of character! I have always defended the mother's rights in the way of guardianship; but an attempt like this makes me doubt."

"Well, Doctor, I must say I wonder at you," said Mrs. Murray; "because a young woman does not understand your domestic architecture, as you call it, you begin to doubt whether she should have the care of her own bairns! I cannot see the connection."

"Perhaps not, perhaps not, my dear," said Dr. Murray; "but it's very reasonable, for all that."

Hepburn felt with great secret content that he had escaped in the midst of this discussion, and he came boldly to a pause at the next corner, to take leave of his companions. But he was not so safe as he supposed.

"I am going to write to St. Andrews to-day," said Mrs. Murray, as she gave him her hand. "I will tell Marjory that you are very kind to Mrs. Charles, and go to see her every day. It is very kind, though it is, perhaps, a little dangerous; but then, to be sure, you have a great deal of idle time on your hands."

This shot was double, hitting both ways, and

sent the unfortunate young man away in a fever of indignation, suppressed wrath, and uneasiness. There could be no doubt that he had a great deal of spare time on his hands; but few people like to be told this. And he was not anxious that Marjory should be made aware of his daily devotions at Pitcomlie. He did not return there, as he had intended to do, but took a long walk in a contrary direction, and reflected with much annoyance upon this unlucky encounter, and all the comments of which he would be the object.

"After all, I have a right to go where I please," he said to himself—which was as true as anything could be, yet did not reveal a comfortable state of mind. "And I do not know how they could get on without me," he added, also to himself, a whole hour after, with a gleam of complacency in the midst of his uneasiness. But he was not prepared to give up his allegiance to Marjory, or to meet again even in imagination the smile with which she had recognised his first infidelity. He wanted still, like so many other people, to keep both delights, his ideal and his foolish fancy, both together. Indeed, it may be said that Mrs. Murray's threat had as serious an effect upon Johnnie Hepburn as that other appalling threat of another heir had upon Verna. Both of them felt, with a thrill of alarm, that their position was an assailable—nay, a dangerous—one, and that it was impossible to tell what an hour might bring forth. And both of them were moved instantaneously to the adoption of a more prudent course. Verna sacrificed her plans for the

new wing, and Johnnie sacrificed the enervating delight of another hour's philandering. Thus they propitiated Fate; which, however, seldom accepts such sacrifices. The chief sufferer by these prudential measures was Matilda, who, being impervious at once to reason and to sentiment, did not understand her sister, and was much annoyed by the withdrawal of her attendant, who amused her, if nothing more. She was the person really sacrificed, and that without seeing any reason for it. She yawned through the afternoon, until benign Providence sent her a soft slumber, which carried her through the time till dinner; and certainly it was hard, though natural, that she, the only one who had no responsibility, should thus be made the principal victim.

CHAPTER XI.

MARJORY'S letter was brought to Fanshawe before he had left his room in the morning. This room was in the Albany, and though a most comfortable chamber, was not luxurious, nor of a character to have called forth the strictures of any reasonable Mentor. There were no opera-dancers on the walls. Fanshawe had long got over the period of artistic taste which delights in opera-dancers, if indeed he had ever gone through it. The few prints on his walls were good. To be sure there was a racehorse or two, but of these, of late days, he had the grace to be ashamed; and over his mantel-piece he had quite lately hung a print of one of Raphael's Madonnas, in which he thought he saw a resemblance to Marjory. It was a fantastic resemblance, wholly existing in the imagination of the beholder; but such compliments of the heart have been paid before now even to plain women, and Marjory was not plain. It seemed to Fanshawe —to carry out the fantastical character of the idea —that it was only in his best moments that he saw this likeness. Sometimes he looked for it vainly, and called himself a fool to have entertained such a notion; but at other times it would shine out upon him, filling him with a kind of heavenly pleasure—that pleasure which glows in a man's heart,

and makes him feel his own nature exalted in a consciousness of the excellence of his love. Marjory's little notes were very rare delights, and this all the more so for being utterly unexpected. He had written to her a long letter only two days before, and he had expected no reply. Was it possible that this could be the answer? The question was all the more interesting to him because he had delicately implied in his letter an inclination to visit St. Andrews. He had heard so much of that ancient borough; he had been quite excited by the account some of his friends had given him (he said) of the charms of the place; and London was empty, void, null, and unprofitable; he had never seen it so vacant, so uninteresting; he could not believe that he had ever found any pleasure in such a mental and moral desert. So he wrote, not without a certain eloquence. The centre of the world had shifted; it was no longer in London, but in St. Andrews; this, however, though he implied it, he did not say. And to receive so rapid an answer seemed to him a fortunate sign. He jumped out of bed in haste, and clothed himself, that he might read it with due respect. But soon the vague delight of anticipation on his face changed into something more serious. Marjory's note was singularly different from the diffuse and much implying epistles which he was in the constant habit of addressing to her. In this there was not a word more than was absolutely necessary. It ran as follows:—

"I have made a discovery which is of the very

deepest importance to us, and to the memory of my poor brother Tom, who was your friend. I have no right to ask your help, but I do, knowing you will not refuse me. Come to me, I beg of you, for Tom's sake. I write in great haste to save the post. Oh, Mr. Fanshawe, come!

"M. H. H."

Across this brief letter was written, very much blotted, a single line. "I have found——" He made out as much as this, but the last letters were so blotted that he could not decipher them. It looked like a name. Whom had she found? or what could have happened to excite her so? But he scarcely paused to ask himself these questions. He was too late for the day mail to Scotland—how he cursed himself for his indolence!—and had to wait the whole day through till the evening. At one time he thought of telegraphing to her; but there lingered a hope in Fanshawe's mind that perhaps she had sent for him of her own impulse, and that "everybody" was not in the secret, a hope which he loved to cherish. He waited accordingly, most drearily, trying to get through the time as he best could, and finding it drag so that the day seemed to him as long as all the preceding year. He went from one club to another, by way of getting through the time; he went and made all sorts of ridiculous purchases; he looked at his watch about a million times; indeed, he kept dragging it in and out of his pocket, and watching the slow fluctuations of light in the afternoon, like a man possessed by one sole

idea—which was a perpetual calculation how soon it would be nine o'clock.

Fanshawe arrived next day at St. Andrews, with a mist of excitement about him, through which he seemed to see but dimly the actual features of the place. He watched the long lines of the Links flying past the windows of the railway carriage, as he had seen all the intermediate plains and hills of the Scotch border and Midland counties since daybreak, with a strange sense that he himself was making no progress, but that they were rushing past and away from him. When he saw at last the group of spires which ended those long lines of grass, and stepped out upon ground which did not fly under his foot, it was as if he had dropped from the clouds into some mystic country which could not but bring him the uttermost weal or woe, yet was unknown to him as fairyland. He felt a tremour in his very frame as he stepped into that strange world, where it seemed impossible to him to conceive of the common accidents of every day, where there could be nothing, he felt, but great emotions, passions, excitement—events which he could not foresee, changes which he dared not anticipate. To fall into the ordinary stream of people arriving at a railway, calmed him down to some extent, and he set out to walk into the town without any self-betrayal. But he had not gone far before he saw a slight tall figure, clothed in black, detaching itself from the groups on the Links, and coming towards him with a step and bearing which he could not mistake. He stood still, restraining himself with

difficulty from the cry of joy that seemed ready to burst from his lips. They say that love is but an accident in a man's life, while it is everything in a woman's; but it would be nearer the truth to say that a man's absorption in this dream cannot last, while a woman's may. Nothing could be more absolute than Fanshawe's absorption at this moment in thought of the woman thus approaching him. Adam, when he saw Eve, the only human companion for him, could not have been more entirely bound and limited to the one being. This man saw nothing else, heard nothing else, felt nothing else in heaven or earth. He had asked himself sometimes whether he was at all, what is called, in love with Marjory Hay-Heriot. He asked himself no questions now. He did not care for what she was going to tell him, for what her business was, for the discovery affecting her family, for his friend's memory, or anything else. He felt, saw, heard nothing but her. He did not seem even to have strength enough in himself to go to meet her. The very sight of her had caught him as in a trance of rapture. He felt that he could have wept over the hand she held out to him, like a baby, and mumbled it like an idol-worshipper. That he did neither, but only grasped it, and gazed at her with eyes full of speechless joy, seemed to him the most wonderful power of self-control. But Marjory's eagerness was of a very different kind. As always, one of the two was at a disadvantage. He thought first and only of her; she thought of a great many other things, and then finally of him. Common consent allots

this state of feeling to the man, but common consent is often wrong. It depends upon which of the two, man or woman, is the most deeply in earnest. "*L'un qui se laisse aimer*" is not always of the masculine gender, as a great many people know.

Marjory came up to him with an eagerness and satisfaction which would have been—oh! how delightful—had there not been other causes for it. She held out her hand to him, and then took his arm as if he had been her—brother. Yes, a great deal too much as if he had been her brother; but let that pass; it was very pleasant all the same, and then she said,

"How good of you to come! but I knew you would come. I felt myself safe in appealing to you."

She had thought then of appealing to some one else! This was not satisfactory; but Fanshawe was too happy at that moment to insist upon having everything his own way.

"Could there be any question about that?" he said, smiling at her with that look of imbecile emotion which no woman can mistake. Marjory, however, was too deeply absorbed with her own private anxieties to pay much heed to his looks. She said nothing more that could give him an opening for the disclosure of any personal feeling; but rushed into her story at once, a proceeding which was flattering, yet unsatisfactory. It was with an effort that he brought himself to attend. Even though it was the voice which most interested him in the world which spoke, herself, her presence,

the sensation of her vicinity, the glimpse of a new world about him—a world entirely identified with her, a new scene of which he knew nothing save through her, strange people passing who sent her greetings from over the way, smiles as she passed them—did so entirely occupy and bewilder the newcomer, that it cost him as serious an effort as he had ever made in his life to understand what Marjory was saying to him, or even to listen to what she said. She told him such a story as might have caught the ear of any man capable of listening, but yet somehow it did not catch Fanshawe's. Her hand on his arm, her head bent forward, so much more eagerly than he had ever seen it before, even the fall of her dress, the very hanging sleeve that touched him, the veil that once fluttered across his face, all and every one of these things dissipated his mind. He had no intellect at all to speak of at that moment, and hers was in the liveliest action. By moments, a half comic sense of his incapacity to come up to her requirements seized upon him. He grew rueful and humble as he was compelled over and over again to ask for new explanations.

"Forgive me, I did not quite catch what you said. Will you tell me that again, Miss Heriot? I am stupid. I did not quite make out—"

After a great many of these interruptions, Marjory began to feel a little check upon her enthusiasm, and to grow chilled in her warm expectation of sympathy.

"I fear I am making too great a call upon you,"

she said coldly, drawing back with a perceptible diminution of warmth; and there can be no doubt that for that moment the accusations against Fanshawe which she had opposed so warmly rushed back upon her mind all at once, though with a generous effort she thrust them away from her. The light failed all in a moment out of her eager upturned face, her head returned to its ordinary pose of quiet and proud decorum, something changed even in the touch with which her hand held his arm. Fanshawe woke up to this with sudden alarm. He roused himself in a moment from the haze and torpor of happiness in which he had not known what he was doing—or rather he leapt out of it suddenly, startled by the sense that his happiness, if he did not rouse himself, might slip out of his hands.

"You find me very stupid?" he said, "I am sure you must think so; but I have some excuses I cannot tell you of—and there is one that I can tell you; I have been travelling all night."

"To be sure, I should have thought of that," said Marjory, but she did not resume her former tone; and poor Fanshawe, knowing it was so different a reason which had made him dull of comprehension, had to accept the excuse which he had given for himself, of being weary, though he felt it the most miserable of excuses. He had to put up with it, though he felt that it gave her quite a false impression of him, and brought him low in her eyes, a thing which people are compelled to do often, yet which is always hard. They walked on

together accordingly, Marjory, with a little impatient sigh of submission, giving up her great subject for the moment; and talked of the journey and its fatigues, and the time occupied, and what the traveller thought of the country he had passed through, &c., &c. He was perfectly able to understand whatever she said to him now; fully roused up, with his intellect restored to him, and all his senses. But she was courteously, gently silent, accepting what he chose to say to her—to the poor wretch's infinite misery and confusion, need it be said?

Mr. Charles caught a glimpse of them from the window of the club. He was sitting quietly discussing a match; but when he saw this sudden apparition, he started up and went to the window.

"Bless me! that's very like Fanshawe," he said to himself; and after a long gaze, which assured him that it was Fanshawe, and no one else, he retired, much perplexed, to his chair, and henceforward left the most exciting game that had been played for years to be discussed by the other speakers. "It's not that I have any objection to him personally," Mr. Charles mused, not knowing what to make of it; and then he asked himself what it was he had heard of Fanshawe?—that he drank, or gambled, or something? What was it? Thus a lively scandal had crept up in Mr. Charles's mind by means of the very simple and passive one promulgated by Mr. Seton. He was much troubled. If Marjory should really show a liking for one whose reputation was compromised in any such way, what

was he, her uncle and guardian, to do? To be sure, she was old enough to judge for herself, which was a great relief to his mind; and the chances were very strong that she would prefer her own opinion to his, in any circumstances. But still Mr. Charles saw very stormy waters before him, on the supposition that Marjory liked Fanshawe, and that Fanshawe gambled or drank. He took his way home in an anxious state of mind, and found that his fears were so far justified. Mr. Fanshawe had sent his bag to the "Royal," but he had walked across with Miss Heriot to dinner. He was very conciliatory, asking many questions about golf, and doing his very best to make himself agreeable. If he had not been such a faulty person, he would have been a great acquisition to the little party. But then, Mr. Charles asked himself, was it right to countenance the introduction into Marjory's society of a man who gambled or drank? What would Miss Jean say? He felt himself so weak in this respect, that he instinctively resorted to her judgment, as the only standard he knew of. If it was on Marjory's account (and what more likely?) that Fanshawe had come—and if Marjory liked him, what then was Mr. Charles to do? He had not (he said to himself) a father's authority; he would not for the world make the girl unhappy; and yet how far would this be from marrying her well? "Confound marrying!" Mr. Charles said, with unusual emphasis, when he found himself left alone after dinner—the unexpected, and, so far as he knew, uninvited guest having left him "to join the ladies,"

at a very early period. He had never married himself; and Marjory was very well off, and had everything her own way—far more, probably, than she would have with a husband. If she did anything to change this beatific state of affairs, the blame would be on her own head. Mr. Charles washed his hands of it for his part. But yet he could not wash his hands of Marjory, nor of Miss Jean and her requirements; and there never was old bachelor disposed to a quiet life, yet anxious to please everybody, whose mind was more painfully bewildered and held in suspense.

Fanshawe hastened to the drawing-room, more anxious to regain his lost ground than even to conciliate the uncle, though that, too, seemed to him very necessary. He found Marjory seated in her usual place in the deep, narrow window, with a background made up of pale sky, a gleam of deeper-coloured blue, which was the sea, and a pale shaft of the ruin between, as graceful and light as Gothic art could make it. Her profile was marked out against these deepening tones of blue, and the grey time-bleached canopy work of the old Cathedral enclosed it like the picture of a saint. This was how he felt it, being, as the reader perceives, in an excited and exalted condition of mind; for in reality, Marjory was neither like a Saint nor a Madonna, being too human, too modern a woman for any abstractions. But if men in love did not fancy such things, what would become of poetry? He drew a chair to her side, approaching as near as he dared venture, or rather as near as he could;

for little Milly, her sister's shadow, sat on her foot-stool with her golden locks in a glory round her, leaning upon Marjory's lap, and dividing her from all new-comers.

"I am not so stupid as I seem," said Fanshawe. "I have my wits about me now. Will you tell me all about it again?"

"Not all," said Marjory, laying her hand upon little Milly's head. Poor little Milly! She had been in the highest spirits about Fanshawe's arrival; and the wretch felt her so dreadfully in his way! He restrained his impatience, however, as he best could, with a sigh which roused a certain sense of the humour of the situation in Marjory's mind.

"I hope you have quite recovered from your fatigue," she said.

"Do not be too hard upon me," said poor Fanshawe. "It was not fatigue. My head was turned with being here, and seeing you again. But tell me, now? I have shaken myself up, and come back to ordinary life. We are still mortal; we have to tie white ties, and dine on fish and mutton, as if we were on common unenchanted soil, and not in Fife at all; therefore, I am capable now of listening and understanding. Tell me as much as you can."

This speech roused Marjory to a certain girlish levity, notwithstanding the seriousness of the situation.

"It is a new thing to hear Fife spoken of as if it could be enchanted soil," she said, with a smile,

which felt to Fanshawe like a stray ray of sunshine. And then her face grew graver, like that of the Virgin Mother in his picture. "All I have to say is—about *her*," she added, her voice sinking almost into a whisper; so low as to tantalize Milly, who was listening with all her ears.

"About whom?"

"You did not understand me? I feared so, Mr. Fanshawe, I know now what poor Tom meant when he was dying, when he thought he had told me. I have found Isabell!"

CHAPTER XII.

"AGNES, this gentleman was one of my brother's friends; you may say everything to him that you have said to me."

This Marjory said in her own drawing-room in St. Andrews, where she stood between Fanshawe and the homely stranger, who had attracted so much of her attention and curiosity before she knew why it was. The girl's appearance was unchanged; she stood with a certain suppressed defiance still in her aspect, before the lady whom she had distrusted, and whom even now she felt disposed to approach with caution. She was Isabell's sister, but she was not like Isabell. The refinement and grace of the other were altogether wanting to her; she was in perfect keeping with her homely dress, her rustic manners — even the air of half-irritated, half-distressed antagonism with which she looked at her novel companions. Agnes Jeffery was in no way superior to her condition, except in so far as she was superior to all conditions in the force of a vigorous and loyal nature; she looked from one to the other with doubtful eyes.

"You may ken the gentleman, Miss Heriot, but I don't; I dinna feel justified in disclosin' the affairs of my folk to every new person that may come in. It's no our way; maybe when folk are more frank,

and tell everything, it's easier for them; but it's no our way."

"You trusted me," said Marjory; "and this gentleman is as I am" (she did not think of the meaning that might be put upon her words—not at least till long afterwards, when they filled her with confusion; but Fanshawe did, being more interested in these words than in any revelation the stranger could make to him). "He saw my poor brother Tom die; he heard him—as I told you—make an effort to reveal all this to me; he has done everything for us, and he will help us now. You may tell him as you told me."

"Is he anything to you?" said Agnes gravely, searching Marjory's face with her eyes.

And that young woman, utterly disconcerted, caught another glance at the same moment—a look which was full of the most wistful entreaty, yet just touched with fun, and an involuntary sense of all that was laughable in the question. Fanshawe felt as if life and death were involved for him in the reply; and yet he could not quench that twinkle of mischievous consciousness, which poor Marjory felt, too, notwithstanding the gravity of all the surrounding circumstances, and the solemnity of the question. Her eyes fell before the double look fixed upon her; her face flushed deeply; she cleared her throat, and faltered in uttermost confusion. It required all his anxiety, supplemented by all his self-control, to keep down the laugh which almost mastered Fanshawe's muscles and faculties. If he had laughed, woe betide him; for in moments of emotion, no

one likes the idea of being laughed at; and Marjory's temper was something less than angelic. She conquered herself with an effort, and answered at last steadily.

"Mr. Fanshawe is my friend," she said; "he is the friend of the family; he is (this Marjory said proudly, remembering Seton's report of him, remembering Mr. Charles, and bearing her testimony with a certain consciousness of doing something to set him right with the world), one of those men who will work and suffer, if need be, for their friends—as you have worked and suffered, Agnes. He will not weigh what is enough or too much to do. Of all my friends, and we have many, he was the only one whom I felt I could appeal to — who would pause at nothing. Is that enough for you? It ought to be; for it is what you have done yourself."

Agnes looked at him with growing surprise, and at Marjory's excitement, which reflected itself in Fanshawe's astonished face. The girl divined, as Marjory herself did not, that he was bewildered, abashed, even humbled by this praise. He stole round to her side, and took her hand and kissed it humbly.

"What can I have done to make you say this?" he cried; "how have I deceived you? I did not mean it. I have done nothing to deserve this."

The girl's eyes were very sharp, enlightened by the habit of observing others. And she was not sympathetic enough to care for the natural emotion which she was clever enough to perceive. She said

with that disregard for them, as soon as she was herself satisfied, which is common to the uncultivated mind:

"Miss Heriot, I'll ask no more questions. If you'll sit down, and let me speak, I'll tell you all there is to tell. Maybe I would not have come had I known what you wanted; but I'll tell you now."

This brought the others to a very abrupt stop. Fanshawe withdrew, feeling himself somewhat snubbed, if truth must be told, and in a state of mind —in respect to this girl and her sister—very different from the attitude of enthusiastic devotion in which Marjory had depicted him. But he listened, nevertheless, feeling himself pledged to an interest which was more deep than he really felt. What was Tom Heriot to him? But Marjory was everything; therefore he made an effort, and threw all his attention into the new tale.

"I take it for granted," said Agnes, with that *brusque* tone of suppressed excitement, sometimes scantly courteous, which often characterizes the Scotch peasant, "that you have told the gentleman all that my poor Bell told you; she did not do it with my will; but since it's done, and she's called in the help of others to right her, instead of her ain folk, I have no further call to resist. You have told the gentleman how they were married—"

"Married!" said Fanshawe, with a slight start.

"What did you think else?" said the girl, turning upon him with sudden defiance. "Did you think it was a light lass, of no account, that you were to hear of? for if sae, I'll go away and trouble

you no further. It is clear that you have not been prepared to hear of my sister Bell."

"Agnes, you must not be so hasty," said Marjory, humbly. "Mr. Fanshawe—I told you—have you forgotten—last night—"

Fanshawe had not forgotten last night, and was not likely to forget it; but he had, it must be allowed, received the information given him with less seriousness than it deserved. He had to make the humblest and most abject apologies to both of the somewhat stern judges before whom he stood—Marjory, who was abashed by the dullness of her pupil, and Agnes who was all in arms. After this interruption, however, he was on his guard, and the narrative proceeded more smoothly. It was not of a very novel character. Tom Heriot had married Isabell Jeffrey, not entirely as the heir of Pitcomlie should have married its future mistress, but yet lawfully, according to the customs of the country, and to traditions fully accepted in the class to which she belonged. They had pledged themselves to each other as man and wife in the presence of the people in whose house they had met, a man whom Heriot had employed to take charge of his dogs while shooting in the district from which the sisters came, a mountain village in Perthshire. The marriage had been concealed, as such marriages generally are, until the last moment, when it had been necessary to avow it for the sake of poor Isabell's character. But by that time Tom Heriot was dead, and could no longer be appealed to—and even the mother,

utterly cast down by the shame of her favourite child, had refused to believe the unlikely story.

"There was nobody but me, nobody but me," said Agnes, warming with her tale, "that kent my poor Bell would never lie. My mother; my mother is a decent woman, of a decent honest family. Lightheadedness or shame never was heard of in her kith or kin; all douce, steady folk, constant at the kirk, and mair thought of than the very Minister himsel'. It made her wild. From no believing at first that anything was wrang—which was natural—for wha could believe it? she went off in a mad way to no believing Bell. I can excuse her, for my part. If I had not trusted Bell from the very first, I would have killed her with my hands. John Macgregor and his wife had gone away, nobody kent where. There was no a creature to stand by her to say it was true. Oh, Miss Heriot! you've heard Bell's story, but no mine. You can never ken the days that passed, and the weary nights—her in a way to want a' the comfort that kindness could give her, and lifting up her white face a' the time without support or help, to say to them that would na believe her, 'The bairn is my man's lawful bairn, and I'm his wife.' Oh, I'm no heeding," cried Agnes, "though there's a man here! I'm no one to speak o' such things before a gentleman. But to see her in her trouble, aye crying out in her pains, 'I've naething to think shame of, mother, there's naething to think shame of!' I'm hard," said Agnes, stopping suddenly, "but no so hard as to withstand that."

"You were always her support and comfort," said Marjory, taking her hand, and with tears in her eyes.

"Was anything else possible? I kent our Bell, ay, better than my mother. She was aye delicate. She never could stand what I could stand. She would aye read her book when she had a moment —no like me that am just a country lass—and oh, so bonnie! When gentlemen came by, they would make errands for a drink of water, or to warm their feet, or to light a cigar, or the like of that, just for the sake of a good look at her. Mr. Heriot was a pleasant gentleman. He had aye a good excuse. He would have this question and that to ask my mother, as if it was her he was wanting. The Lord forgive him," cried Agnes, "if he meant to deceive! for he is dead and gone, and canna be punished—and I wouldna wish him to be damned for ever and ever, though he would weel deserve it, richly deserve it—if he wanted to deceive!"

Notwithstanding all her interest and all her sympathy, this was hard for Marjory's proud spirit. She moved uneasily in her chair, she grew hot and flushed, her brow contracted, her foot beat upon the carpet.

"He did not mean to deceive," she cried, impatiently. "I know he did not. He thought he had told me. Such a thing was not possible—"

"I hope so," said Agnes, composing herself. "But he kept Bell without a written word, not so much as a 'wife' in his letters, nor signing himself her husband—no a single word. They had good

reason to think she was deceived. And the little bairn was no sooner born—ye havena seen him, Miss Heriot; he's like your bonnie little sister with the gold hair—than a friend saw in the papers that Mr. Heriot was dead in England. Oh, that terrible time! Sickness is ill, and grief's warse, and shame the warst of a'; but a' three at once upon one bit delicate head, a' three! and neither consolation nor support, neither pity nor fellow-feeling! Ye may think I'm whiles no very civil nor respectful to them that's above me. I canna help it; my heart's bitter at you a'—bitter! bitter!—at them that lead the poor and simple astray, and leave them to bear the wyte—them that go away and enjoy themselves, and live — or even that go and die — and leave other folk behind to pay the price. It's them I hate."

"But the people who could have proved all this?" said Fanshawe. "Surely you speak too strongly. If there are people who can prove it, why blame Mr. Heriot? He was snatched away from this life; he had not time for anything. But if it rests on the testimony of witnesses—"

Agnes turned round to look at him, with the colour gradually rising over her face. The look of defiance was still there, but over it, as it were, like another surface, was a flutter of painful hesitation and humility—humility which was compulsory, and all the harder on that account. She looked at him with a dilation of the eyes expressive of such mental strain and painful exertion, as he had scarcely ever been conscious of witnessing before,

and with a thrill in her voice, answered him steadily, looking him all the time in the face.

"It rests on my sister's word, Sir, which is as the word of an angel out of heaven; for we've nae testimony—nae testimony! It rests upon Isabell's word."

Fanshawe's countenance changed. He could not help it; he was not used to conceal his sentiments; but almost before he was capable of realizing this new and strange avowal, the girl had started to her feet.

"I am going home, Miss Heriot!" she cried. "You meant nae harm, but ye've given me another stroke — and we've borne enough from you and yours—"

"Agnes," cried Marjory, arresting her. "You cannot go away from me; whatever happens, we must work this out together. What has any one done?"

"Look at him!" cried the girl, with pale indignation. "Oh, this is what I kent would happen if I was made to leave my ain way—to go among gentles, and make them believe, and summer and winter every word! He thinks it's a lie. What does he care for our Isabell and her bairn? He cares for you; and he thinks that what I'm telling you is a lie!"

Fanshawe did not contradict her. He looked at Marjory gravely, with a certain anxiety in his glance. He thought, as was natural enough, and as men so often think in respect to a woman's judgment, that she had been led away by her feel-

ings. He made her a little warning sign with his head.

"If, as you tell me, her own mother did not believe this story, is it wonderful that I should hesitate?" he said. "I do not think it is a lie; but I fear she may have been deceived."

"By Tom?" said Marjory. She was almost as indignant as the other. "If Isabell has been deceived, then Tom—my brother, has been a—— What can I say? Is there a word bad enough—vile enough?"

He was cowed between these two young women. He dared not say, as he might have said elsewhere, that men do not form the same harsh judgment of such deceptions. He made a gesture of deprecation, holding up his hands in entreaty.

"You are too hard upon me," he said. "I did not mean to blame either side; but if this is so, why cannot these people—the witnesses—be produced?"

"Let me speak to him, Miss Heriot," said Agnes. "Maybe the gentleman thinks it's a' my invention from beginning to end? and it's me that must speak. I've been to seek them, Sir, a' over Scotland, from one end to another. I've been directed here, and I've been directed there. I've gone after them night and day. I've written letters to them. I've sought out their friends. The little infant is three months auld, and all that time I've been on the road. I had left my place for Isabell's sake; she didna tell me why, but since I've found it was for him, that it might not be said he had a near friend

in service. All the little siller I had, I've spent seeking them; and, oh, I canna find them, I canna find them!" cried the girl, suddenly breaking down, and bursting into passionate weeping. "I've prayed the Lord on my knees, and He'll no send them; and I cannot find them; and my bonnie Bell will die before I can clear her name!"

Her voice had risen loud and shrill in the height of her emotion, and now she sat down and covered her face, struggling with her sobs. It was not in Fanshawe's heart to remain insensible to this outburst. He sat looking at her with a guilty face, as if he were the author of her distress.

"Can I do anything?" he said. "Is there any way of helping her to find them if they are to be found?"

But there was not in his tone the enthusiasm for the search which Marjory had expected to move him. The very sound of his voice chilled instead of invigorating her. While Agnes slowly recovered her composure, Marjory informed him in detail of the inquiries which had been made. These were very primitive, unskilful inquiries. The girl knowing of few means of procuring information except the simple one of going to ask for it, had wasted a great deal of time and much labour on a comparatively narrow round. She had indeed written to various people whom she believed to be Macgregor's relations to ask information about him, but the idea that he and his wife might be reluctant witnesses, or adverse altogether to the establishment of the truth, had made her distrustful of letters.

"How could I tell that they would not get out o' my way, if I sent them word I was coming?" she said. "How was I to ken that they werena enemies? And even if they were friends, they mightna like to take that trouble, or their maisters mightna like it. Few folk like to take trouble; and when you just send them a letter—Na, na, I went mysel. I would never trust to that."

In short, poor Agnes had distrusted everybody. She had distrusted Miss Heriot up to the last moment. She distrusted her still, notwithstanding Isabell's better instinct. She looked at the two together at the present moment with a watchful eye, not half sure that they were not plotting something against, rather than in favour of her search. When she heard them speak of the loss of time, her heart swelled within her. She who had done everything so carefully, so warily, letting nobody know, treating everybody as enemies, making so many subtle, simple schemes to entrap the missing witnesses, was it possible that, after all, she had been letting the precious moments slip out of her hand, the last days of her sister's life? Agnes was glad to go away, leaving the last and only possible traces of the missing Macgregors in Marjory's hands, to go out to the silence of the long seaside walk, and to cast her troubled mind abroad to seek out new means of working. She knelt down under the shadow of the Maiden's Rock, in a crevice of that natural tower, and poured out all her passionate heart in an impassioned prayer. "Oh, bring them to me—bring them!" she prayed, demanding a

miracle with pathetic earnestness. There are circumstances in which it is more painful to receive help than to be kept without it. Agnes, poor girl, endured the aid which had fallen upon her with a proud agony of submission, feeling that her heart was torn asunder by the necessity. She had so set her heart upon doing it all herself; she had taken pleasure in her hardships and wanderings, her long walks up and down, and the painful inquiries that never came to anything. And oh, if all this had been but a loss of time! She tried to contradict the thought, though a consciousness that it was true would keep creeping chill upon her. But oh, if the Lord would but step in and direct her, and make her find them now! If He would but prove that the race was not to the swift nor the battle to the strong! If He, the last resort, the final resource in everything, would but bring them to her—put them, as it were, in her hand! Agnes opened her eyes, and clambered down from the rocks, her heart aching with the hope that she might yet meet with strangers on the way, and find that her prayer had been answered. But there was no one to be seen on the long stretch of seaside path, not a soul anywhere. And thus in her humiliation she went slowly home, feeling as if this work, the work that might save Isabell's life, was taken out of her hands.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE two who were left behind were not much more comfortable than Agnes. Marjory, for her part, could not but feel somewhat humiliated too. She had appealed to Fanshawe in the fervour and exultation of her heart, just after she had been roused by the blame she had heard of him, into, perhaps, an unjustifiable adoption of his cause. When he had been blamed, she had asserted his good qualities so indignantly, that faith in what she had herself said had moved her to put him to the test, with a generous and proud confidence. He might be good for nothing, so far as himself was concerned; but he was good for everything to his friends. And lo! at the very first touch, he had been found wanting. He had taken twenty-four hours even to understand the story; and now, when he understood it, he displayed no desire to take up the cause of the injured, no readiness of belief in her, no wish to exert himself in her service. She could not but see that to secure her own society, to be near her and associated with her, Fanshawe would interest himself in almost anything; but that was a very different matter from the generous interest she had expected, and the active help she had desired. She had thought

nothing less than that he would go off instantly, scarcely asking a moment to breathe and repose himself, in search of the missing witnesses; and lo! he never suggested the possibility of looking for them at all; he did not even seem to consider himself involved in any way in the matter—as, indeed, he was not, Marjory proudly confessed to herself. She was disappointed, mortified, cut down in her own estimation; though why she should have been so, simply because he had failed her, it is difficult to say. Marjory did not utter her disappointment in words, but she adopted a still more effectual way of showing it. She ascended into regions of lofty politeness which froze the very soul of the visitor within him. She addressed him as she might have done a potentate who had paid to an inferior power the unexpected honour of a visit. She carefully banished all allusion to the business, which yesterday had occupied and excited her so much, from her conversation—and turned that upon trivial subjects, upon the passing events which figured in the newspapers, upon St. Andrews, and the ruins, and golf. Poor Fanshawe was utterly and dismally crushed by this treatment. For an hour after Agnes's hasty departure, when it had been put in force, he held out under it as best he could, pretending to wish to hear about the Cathedral, and the Castle, and the old town of St. Rule. It was when she suggested a visit to the antiquities after lunch, in company with Dr. Smith, who knew so well how to explain them, that his fortitude failed. He went up to her side with something like timidity.

"It was not for the ruins," he said, half reproachfully, half timidly, "that I came."

"Well, perhaps not," said Marjory; "but when you are in a place where there are interesting ruins, you are bound to visit them, don't you think?"

Fanshawe made no direct reply; but slightly encouraged by her tone, drew a chair near her.

"And it was not for golf I came."

"I suppose not, seeing you do not know anything about it. Nothing but utter ignorance," said Marjory, beguiled to a smile in spite of herself, "could have excused the extraordinary questions you put to my uncle last night."

"Were they extraordinary questions?" he said, still more encouraged. "No, I did not come for the golf, nor for the sea, nor for St. Andrews, nor for society. I came, because you sent for me; an inducement which would have taken me to the end of the world."

"Pray don't remind me how presumptuous I have been, and foolish," said Marjory, reddening, "to send for you, without considering whether you would agree with me about the importance of the cause."

"Miss Heriot, I agree with enthusiasm that I am at your service, always and everywhere."

"Pray, pray, Mr. Fanshawe! don't make me feel more ridiculous than I do already. Let us talk of other things."

"Why should not we talk of the one that interests you most—of that you sent for me about?"

"Because, simply, it does not interest you," said Marjory, looking at him with a smile—that steady,

forcibly kept-up smile of incipient quarrel which is so far from agreeable to encounter.

Poor Fanshawe was in despair. He ought to have been pleased, on the contrary, had he had his wits about him; for such quarrels never arise between indifferent persons. He started up from his chair, and made a rapid course round the room, and seized upon the brief notes of address and reference which Agnes had left.

"I will go away, then, and execute your commission," he said, in an altered voice; "since that is all you wanted me for. It is too good for me, I allow, that you should employ me at all, and for that I am grateful. But I think you are a little hard upon me," he went on. "You make no allowance for the feeling I have in seeing you drawn into such a connection; placed in the position of sister to a girl who —and brought into constant contact with this sister. I have that to get over before I can approach the subject dispassionately. You do not know what sort of people such women are."

"Do you?"

"God forgive me, Miss Heriot—I have been as other men!" he said, reddening like a girl. "No, by Heaven! I don't know, except by report and common acceptation; not much—"

"I do," said Marjory, calmly; "I know these two women, and I know the class from which they spring; but that is not the question. I have formed my opinion strongly on the subject. I do not ask you to make it yours."

"It is mine, with all my heart—anything you be-

lieve," said Fanshawe, very wretched, and yet once more with that glimmering of fun which spoilt the pathos of so many a fine situation. Marjory, at this moment, was not inclined to see any humour in it. She went on severely, and with a tremendous courtesy which shrivelled him up.

"I could not, of course, ask you, whose experience in every way is much greater than mine, to adopt my opinion; and nothing but a momentary hallucination, which I hope you will be so very kind as to excuse, could have made me think of transferring to you my work. I beg your pardon for it. It is the absurd way in which we are accustomed to have things done for us—the difficulty a woman finds in moving anywhere without a host of explanations. But pray forgive me; feeling as I do, it is my business to complete poor Agnes's work, and clear up the matter, whatever it may cost me. Of course, there is no reason in the world why I should not do it myself."

"You reject my assistance, then!" said Fanshawe, ruefully. "You take it out of my hands? Miss Heriot, is that fair?"

"I do nothing of the kind," she said; "it is a very important question to me; but not, as stands to reason, with you. You had never heard of the Heriots six months ago, Mr. Fanshawe. It is the most absurd thing in the world to suppose that their interests could be of supreme importance to you."

And she held out her hand once more with that steady smile of polite offence and mortification, for the papers which he still held. He stood for a mo-

ment irresolute, looking at her; then he drew out his watch.

"Yes," he said; "I see I have just half an hour to catch the next train. I am off, Miss Heriot. The notes are vague enough, but still possible. 'Suspected to have gone into service as a porter at one of the hotels in one of the Channel Islands; but may have gone to Australia or New Zealand.' That was a puzzler, I allow, for our friend, who did her journeys on foot. You shall hear from the nearest of these places as soon as possible; and in the meantime, I may as well, I think, send advertisements to all the papers for John Macgregor—that is worth trying."

"But, Mr. Fanshawe, I must not—I cannot—accept such a sacrifice."

"You will say good-bye to me," he said, holding her hand; "and think of me—say once a day, will you, Miss Heriot? Let me see, the best time would be in the afternoon, when one is apt to get low. Think of me then—say from four to half-past four," he said, with once more that gleam of fun in his eye. "And I hope I shall not have to go to Australia." Then he made a momentary pause, and looked at her wistfully again. "Will you come to meet me?" he said, "When I come back?"

"Mr. Fanshawe! I beg, I entreat!"

"But you must promise," he said, with a short laugh. "Good-bye; till we meet again."

What was till they met again? the kiss on her hand? This question, the imbecility of which can only be explained by her extreme agitation, was

the only thing that fluttered through Marjory's mind in that hasty moment, which was over like a dream. She ran to the window and threw it open, and gazed after him. He was gone, actually gone—upon his errand—which might lead him heaven knows where; no doubt she had sent for him with this very purpose; but though she had felt the most sensible mortification when he appeared unwilling to undertake it, yet, nevertheless, his sudden departure quite stupefied Marjory. It put Isabell and Agnes, and their whole story, completely out of her head. She sat down at the open window and watched him as long as he was in sight, and it was with difficulty that she restrained herself from going after him in the strange state of excitement into which his sudden departure threw her. All this was without any action of her mind at all—a sudden whirl of involuntary feeling, nothing more.

But it is impossible to describe the consternation of Mr. Charles when he heard of the departure of their visitor. This was when he returned to luncheon, which he did at the cost of some personal inconvenience—for he had to return to the Links for a match at three o'clock. It was sheer benevolence that brought him, and fear least Marjory should feel herself uncomfortable—thus receiving a stranger, "and no man in the house." The announcement, however, took him entirely by surprise. "Mr. Fanshawe away!" he said; "bless me, Marjory, what has taken him away? What did the man come for, if he was to go away so soon? I was just saying to myself to-day, if he was the same as he was at Pit-

comlie, we might have a difficulty in getting rid of him; and here I find he's off! Maybe, my dear, it was your fault?"

She was annoyed with herself for blushing; but she answered calmly enough: "I do not think so, uncle; he took me very much by surprise."

"Well, my dear," said Uncle Charles, "you must manage your own affairs, and no doubt you'll do it well; but you must mind that though he's a very pleasant person, and was very serviceable, we've heard but a poor account of Mr. Fanshawe. I cannot say I recollect, just at this moment, what it was I heard—"

"Whatever it was," said Marjory, with some heat, "I do not believe it, Uncle Charles."

"Well, well!" said Mr. Charles once more, in a tone of soothing; "I do not bid you believe all you hear, my dear; still it should not be altogether neglected; that's not wise; in short, far from wise. To tell the truth, if he is not away in a pet about something I know nothing of, I'm not sorry, for my part, to be alone to-day. I am vexed by some news I have from good Dr. Murray. I will have to go over there."

"Has anything gone wrong?"

"These young women," said Mr. Charles, shaking his head; "I doubted it from the appearance of them. These young women are behaving themselves very strangely, my dear; they are turning everything upside down. From what I hear, they are meditating meddling with the house; pulling something down, or putting something up, I cannot

tell which; but it's a thing that must not be allowed —nay—so far as I'm aware—guardians have no such power. I mean to speak to Mungo Barmaster this afternoon, and see what he says. But the end of it will be, that I shall have to go over myself," said Mr. Charles, as if there was in that suggestion something very terrible and decisive. He knitted his gentle brows, and repeated once more, with a wavering swing upon his long legs, "I will have to go over myself."

Here another impulse seized upon Marjory, which she obeyed suddenly in her excitement, by way of relieving her own highly wrought feelings.

"Uncle Charles," she said, "there is something on my mind which I would like to tell you. I do not know what you may think of it, whether it may trouble you or please you; but anyhow, it is not a thing we can be indifferent to. I once showed you a letter I had found among poor Tom's papers."

"Among Tom's papers! Ay! do you say so? I've no recollection—"

"Yes, uncle; think! you must remember. It was from a woman."

Mr. Charles roused himself at once.

"A thing that should never have come under your eyes! I said so at the time. Try to forget it, May. Some women I have seen have a morbid sort of curiosity about such persons; but not you, my dear. Try to put it out of your mind."

"You mistake, uncle," said Marjory, gently. "I thought you were mistaken at the time. It is more important than you think. I have seen her—"

"You!" cried Mr. Charles, stammering with sudden anger. "You! Now this beats all! If your brother was coarse enough to think of such a thing, you, Marjory, a delicate young woman, you should have had more feeling."

The implied blame brought the colour warmly to Marjory's cheeks.

"Hush! Uncle Charles. I knew at the time you were mistaken."

"Which is likely to know best, you or I?" said Mr. Charles, with not unnatural exasperation. "May, I am not your father, and I have no real authority; but still you obeyed me when you were a little bairn, and I am your nearest friend. There must be no more of this, no more of this! A young woman has no right to compromise herself."

"Wait, uncle, till you hear me; it is more important than you think. I met her by chance, not knowing who she was. She is very ill—dying. She did not know me any more than I knew her; but I have come to know her story. Hush! wait, Uncle Charles — She was Tom's wife; and she has — a son —"

Mr. Charles turned pale; his lower lip dropped in his surprise, as if he had been struck by sudden illness. He shook so that the pencil he held between his fingers dropped.

"What—what?" he said. "Nonsense! it's raving, it's madness! I'll not credit a word of it; it's some story made up. May, May, tell me it all over again; what does this mean?"

"It means," said Marjory, with sudden com-

posure, which came to her she could not tell how, "that unless we take care to clear it all up, and prove the truth or falsehood of this story, there will be a disputed succession in our family to be fought out; perhaps when we are no longer living; but, one day or other, it will certainly be fought out."

"Bless me! bless me!" said Mr. Charles, walking about the room in great agitation. "What is this? what is this? A disputed succession, a wife and a child—did you say a child, or a son? And, God bless me! if it's true, what kind of a woman must she be that he never dared acknowledge her? He knew how his father wanted him to marry—and a son! Did you say a son? This is the most astonishing piece of news, Marjory," Mr. Charles added, coming up to her, "if it can be relied upon, that I ever heard in all my life."

"I thought it would startle you; but you do not think now I could have helped taking an interest, Uncle Charles? When I heard of the child——"

"God bless us!" said the pious philosopher again. He was too much excited to remain still. He walked up and down the room, repeating broken sentences to himself. "But the mother must be come of very indifferent folk; she must have little to recommend her; she must be some girl that has known how to take care of herself. And then the story may not be true; you must take into account, May, that it's very likely it may not be true."

"That is exactly what I think we must find out —without sparing either money or trouble, Uncle Charles."

"Lord preserve us!" said the old man; "and in that case the other little bairn would have nothing to do with it? and these young women—Marjory, my dear, I see the hand of Providence in this. Does she give full particulars? has she proof? I would not say a word, nor interfere one way or another, without strong and clear evidence. Has she proof?"

"Yes," said Marjory, out of the fulness of her heart. She had no need herself of any proof of Isabell's story. Her face was guarantee of that; and she had a second visionary confidence, as strong or stronger than her trust in Isabell—which was that Fanshawe would find all that was wanted. Thus she took upon herself to answer, as it were, for both of these persons, in her warm affirmation, rather than for the abstract truth. As a matter of fact, the evidence, she knew, was not forthcoming; but Marjory believed in *her*, and she believed also in *him*.

"And these young women at Pitcomlie;" said Mr. Charles, with a gleam of momentary triumph. He was ashamed, however, of his emotion almost before he had expressed it. "That is, my dear," he said, "if there is any truth in the story; which is a thing I scarcely believe."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE confidence which Marjory thus injudiciously, and on the impulse of the moment, shared with her uncle, was premature and indiscreet. No doubt it is hard to shut up a discovery of importance in one's own bosom, and for a woman accustomed to all the continual intercourse and confidence of domestic life, to carry on a series of secret operations, is almost impossible; but the relief afforded was not so great as she had hoped. Mr. Charles could think of nothing else. He questioned and cross-questioned—who was Isabell? what were her people? where did they come from? how did Marjory know that they were respectable or trustworthy? how had she made acquaintance with them? To these questions she could give but scanty answers. Mr. Charles groaned when he heard of the irregular marriage. He shook his head till it ached with the movement.

"In all our records," he said, in piteous tones, "I do not believe, May, that such a scandal has ever happened before. We've had none but virtuous women, my dear, none but good women, and clever women, May. It has always been our strong point. God bless us! and all to end in two fools like these young women at Pitcomlie, and a—— I humbly beg your pardon, my dear."

"Uncle, this girl, who is dying, is like a saint."

Once more Mr. Charles shook his head.

"I never heard yet of a saint that made an irregular marriage," he said, "and as for her dying, my dear, if she's really the heir's mother, far the best thing she can do will be to die. A woman like that would be a dreadful sort of apparition at Pitcomlie. Whatever her people are, they cannot be in a position that would do the infant any credit. Lord preserve us! am I speaking of my own family?" cried Mr. Charles, feeling the wound go to his heart. "One a fool, and the other a—— Poor fellows, they've gone to their account—but there must have been some imperfection in those two lads, my dear, though they were your brothers; there must have been some imperfection. They say the wife a man chooses is the best revelation of his own character. You need not be angry, my dear; I am saying nothing against the poor boys."

"Let us say nothing at all about it, uncle, till we know."

"That's easy said, that's easy said, my dear. You may be able to put it out of your mind, but I cannot. The whole future of the family! Perhaps I had better see the girl, May, and examine her myself?"

"Uncle, she is ill."

"I'll do her no harm, my dear," said Uncle Charles; and he resumed the subject in the morning, to Marjory's dread. He had been brought up to the law, and he had some faith, as was natural, in his own knowledge. "If I once hear her story,

I will see at once what is to be made of it," he said; and as he had been further stimulated by another letter about the proceedings, or intended proceedings of Miss Bassett, the old man was much in earnest. It was the agent of the Bank in Pitcomlie who had sent him this information, and Mr. Charles had come down to breakfast with his hair standing on end, at all the audacities that were contemplated. "I know no precedent — no precedent," he said, with his forehead puckered into a hundred lines. "They say women are conservatives; but I never heard of rebels like them, when they take that lawless turn. A man would think twice before he would meddle with an old-established house; he would think that the past might have its rights, no to speak of the future."

"I don't think folly is of either sex," said Marjory, who was not fond of hearing her own side assailed; "though Verna is not a fool——"

"Verna!" cried Mr. Charles, in his indignation, "she is out of the question, May. I might stand something from your brother's wife. She's a foolish creature, but she's not without good points—at all events she's pretty, which is aye something; and she is poor Charlie's widow; but the other young woman! Do you know, my dear, it's my duty to see this girl, and hear her story myself?"

All that Marjory could do was to effect a compromise—to go herself and prepare poor Isabell, putting off Mr. Charles's visit for another day. Mr. Charles accordingly went out, though late, and hung about the Club all the morning, talking with every

lounger who came in his way (and their name was legion). He told nothing, he was quite convinced; and yet, oddly enough, a vague impression that some story about the House of Pitcomlie—some romance in real life, such as now and then fills every county with lively interest and delight—was about to be made known to the world—came into existence. There were various versions of it instantly created by the conversationalists of the Golf Club.

"I don't know what's afloat among the Heriots," said Mr. Morrison, of St. Rule's; "auld Charlie is going about like a clucking hen; he has some mystery under his wing, that's sure. Either it's some new claimant turned up from Australia, like the one they're making so great a fuss about in London, or——"

"I don't see how that can be," said Major Vee or Captain Eff. "All the Heriots and all their comings and goings are too well known in Fife, and besides, there never was one that disappeared, or did anything he oughtn't to have done."

"They're a fearfully respectable family," said another golfer, with a great emphasis on the adjective; "but Tom Heriot was thrown away upon them. He was not of that mould. If anything's gone wrong, or there's a chance of revelations, I back Tom to be the hero. He was never one of your cut and dry men, foredoomed to be a Laird, and do his duty."

"He was a simple ne'er-do-weel," said Mr. Seton, "like his friend Fanshawe, whom I saw in the town

the other day, by the bye. They were an excellent pair. And there's a sympathy among that sort of people. Miss Heriot, who is as proud as Lucifer, and looks down upon most people, was hanging upon that fellow's arm. If it's some peccadillo of Tom's, no doubt Fanshawe was in it."

"I don't see what Miss Heriot could have to do with any peccadillo of Tom's," said another speaker. "Whatever you may say against women, toleration of their brother's peccadillos is not one of their faults. But Mrs. Charles, I hear, is making a bonny business at Pitcomlie, pulling down the house to build some fine castle or other. That's enough, I should say, to account for old Charlie's troubles. He's like a hen on a hot girdle, fluttering about everywhere. God be praised, he's engaged for a foursome at three o'clock with old Adam of St. Edgar's, and the two Wolffs. A bonny time they will have of it. I saw him lose a putt yesterday that an infant might have played. And talk of putting——"

Here the speaker went off into golf, and left the Heriots. Mr. Charles, however, fulfilled the prophecy in every respect. He produced the most unchristian temper in the partner of his game, and gave his opponents an opportunity for gibes innumerable. Up to this present date a description of the worse putt ever made on the Links, as perpetrated on that unhappy day by Mr Charles Hay-Heriot of the Pitcomlie family, is told for the edification of beginners. The reader, who knows the reason why, will not blame Mr. Charles. He could not, as he

acknowledged, get all these complications out of his head. His placid soul was torn by so many unforeseen calamities. The existing state of affairs was bad enough, and the personal contentions which lay before him, the struggle with "these young women," in which Mr. Charles felt it quite possible that he might be worsted, would, had there been nothing else, have been enough to embitter his peaceful days. The other question, however, came into it with a painful excitement. It did not obliterate the first, as it ought reasonably to have done, since, if the second story was true, Mrs. Charles could have no authority or place at Pitcomlie. Some minds have a faculty for getting all the annoyance possible out of their surroundings, just as some others get all the sweetness possible. Mr. Charles hugged both to his bosom. He groaned over the possibility of having to insert a name never heard of before, and the record of an irregular marriage into the genealogical papers of the Heriots, which had not known such profanation from the time of the Jameses. Talk of the whaling captain, indeed, who had vitiated the blood of the Morrisons! perhaps it was a judgment upon Mr. Charles for his remarks on that flaw; for this was a thousand times worse than any whaling captain. And yet while he groaned over the prospective humiliation, he afflicted his soul at the same time with thoughts of how he was to manage Mrs. Charles and her impertinent sister, who took so much upon her, and yet was not so much as related to the Heriots. The one misery was incompatible with

the other; but yet he took the good, or rather the evil, of them both.

The existence of this doubting, questioning, perplexed, and perplexing companion by her side was no addition to Marjory's comfort. She postponed her visit to the cottage for motives which she scarcely ventured to define—foremost among which was a vague reluctance to meet Agnes again, and to discuss with her the work which she had taken out of her hands. In every such enterprise there comes a moment of discouragement, of painful difficulty, of disgust even, with circumstances which at first filled the mind only with pity and fellow-feeling. Marjory felt that she would gladly have turned her back on the matter altogether; she would fain have forgotten all about it from the day when she first saw the patient face of the sick girl at the cottage door. What had she to do with it? Such an intruder is usually rejected, or at least held at arm's length by "the family." A *mésalliance* is seldom acknowledged or insisted upon by the sister of the man who has made it. Sometimes it occurred to her that it was even unmaidenly on her part to have interfered in the matter; after all, such a marriage was, she said to herself, no marriage at all—unblessed by religion, unhonoured by publicity, a secret expedient to make guilt less guilty—was not that all that could be said for it? and yet what a difference this poor formula made! Without it the girl was a lost creature, covered with shame; with it she was surrounded by the sanctity of a woman wronged, almost a martyr; and yet it was nothing, nothing! a mere expedient to make guilt less

guilty. This was only one of a hundred ways in which Marjory contemplated the subject; and hers was a woman's view of the matter altogether, though not less forcible on that account. The sting of these thoughts was that they had never occurred to her before. She had committed herself in many ways—to Isabell; and still more, to Fanshawe; she had filled the girl with false hopes, and, perhaps, still falser hopes had been raised in the man's mind by her appeal to him. She had sent him out against his will, against his own idea of what was needful —and now she repented! This is the danger of possessing an impulsive temperament. Such disgust and discouragement seldom come until the world has been set on fire by the hasty spirit. Marjory felt (for the moment) that she would gladly have turned her back upon it all now; she would have liked to go away to the end of the world, and get out of sight and hearing of everybody who could remind her of this chapter of her existence. So she thought; and the fact that she could not have taken three steps in her flight before compunction and a revival of all her anxious interest would have seized her, dragging her back again, had really nothing to do with the question. She kept away from the cottage, fearing any intercourse with the sisters, whose cause, for the moment, she felt herself to have abandoned. And it was not until she was roused from this curious discouragement, by the sight of an advertisement in the second column of the "Times," calling upon John Macgregor to disclose himself, that she was roused to something of

her former feeling. This took her by surprise; to her consciousness all progress had been arrested, and everything stayed by the change in her mind; she had done nothing, and she had concluded that nothing was being done. But the sight of the advertisement roused her; she saw that she had set forces in action that could not be stopped, and whatever her own languor might be, she had no longer any right to keep still. As soon as she had realized this, her disgust evaporated like the dew on the grass, and good sense and judgment regained the upper hand. John Macgregor might still be in Scotland, notwithstanding Agnes's failure, and in that case, the "Times" was a very unlikely vehicle of communication with him. She bestirred herself instantly, with a glow at her heart, which, after all, was not immediately caused either by devotion to her brother's memory or regard for Isabell. Who was it that had called Fanshawe good-for-nothing? Marjory laughed softly by herself at the ludicrous inappropriateness of the word—good-for-nothing! She had heard his voice as it were in the dark, calling out to her, telling her he was at work, encouraging her to go on. Marjory filled all the Scotch papers with advertisements during the next week; she demanded John Macgregor from all the winds; but still she did not go to the cottage. Now that she had fairly re-commenced work, it seemed to her that she must wait until she had something to tell.

One day, however, a sudden thought came to her of Isabell's dying condition, and of the possible

consequences of suspense, unbroken by any ray of hope. She set out towards the Spindle on a dreary afternoon, when the clouds hung low, and the sea was black with rising wind. It was the heaviest time of the day—that hour when life runs lowest—when Fanshawe had bidden her think of him. The few vessels visible were struggling between two dark leaden lines of sky and sea; nothing was cheerful or encouraging in the external surroundings. The waves came in with a threatening rush round the Spindle; the wind sighed with a sound of rain; and though she had not expected Isabell to be outside on such a day, yet a sense of unreasonable disappointment arose in Marjory's mind at the absence of the well-known figure from the cottage-door. The door was closed, and no one was visible about. In all the earth and air there seemed no living thing, except in the few ships—big and little, which struggled across the horizon.

"Oh mercy! to myself I said,
If Lucy should be dead!"

The thought was natural enough, so far as Isabell was concerned, but it filled Marjory with remorse as she hurried forward. If Isabell were to die before, one way or other, this matter was cleared up!—it was but too likely she would; but the thought seemed to lend wings to Marjory's feet.

In the little cottage chamber, however, which she thought so still, there was pain enough to demonstrate life, could she but have known. It was a dark little room at all times, for though there were two windows, these windows were little case-

ments composed of very small and very dim panes of greenish glass—one in the front of the house towards the sea, and the other to the back. A smouldering fire burned in the grate, at which stood Isabell's mother in her white mutch, making tea for her invalid. Isabell herself lay in the box, or press-bed, fitted into the wall, which is universal in such cottages. From the airless wooden enclosure her pale face looked out strangely, most unlike, in its pathetic beauty, to everything about. The mother's back was turned, but between the fire and the bed sat Agnes, her ruddy, comely countenance overcast with vexation and care. She was doing nothing, her head was thrown back listlessly, and her hands laid in her lap. They were brown hands, bearing the traces of toil, and their idleness had a certain pathos in it. She sat, too, almost in the middle of the room, as if she had thrown herself down by chance, not knowing, or not caring where. As the mother went and came she stumbled over Agnes's foot, or her chair, and uttered a little querulous exclamation: "Canna you sit in a corner? canna ye get something to do?" she said. "I canna bide to see a woman doing naething; take John's stockings, if you'll do nothing else."

"I have nae heart for stockings, or anything else!" said Agnes with a sigh.

"Eh, woman! if I had been like that how could I have brought you all up?" said the mother. "Seven of a family, and no a penny nor a penny's worth in the world. Do ye think I hadna often a

sair heart? and many a time darena sit down, for fear I should be ower tired to rise again. What are your bits of trouble to that?"

"Do you call yon a bit trouble?" said Agnes, pointing to her sister's bed. The mother's countenance darkened; she turned towards the fire again, turning her back on her sick daughter. "I dinna call that trouble at all," she said; "that's sin and shame."

"Eh, mother, ye're hard, hard! will ye never believe it—not even since you've seen Miss—her man's sister. Will ye no believe her, even now?"

"Dinna speak to me of her man," said the old woman indignantly, pouring the boiling water upon the tea with a certain vindictive movement. All this conversation was carried on in an undernote, that Isabell might not hear. "Her man has been a bonnie man to her; whatever was his meaning; he's brought her naething but misery and shame. What had she to do, giving ear to ane o' thae gentlemen with their false tongues? Gentlemen! I wouldna give an honest man for ten gentlemen—and so it's seen. Give her her tea; I havena the heart to look at her white face," said the mother, turning away; she went and sat down noiselessly in the room, and put up her apron to her eyes. How many different kinds of suffering were shut up there together, all separate, and keeping themselves apart!

The tea was made in silence—the one cordial of poor women's lives—and then the little group subsided once more into their places.

"Have you any word from John?" said the mother, this time loud enough for all to hear.

"I have aye word from John," said Agnes, with a tone of indignation; "whatever happens, he never misses his day."

"But you've come to nae settlement yet about what's to be done. It's a wise bargain you've made, him and you—as wise almost as some other folk; to wait—till when?"

"Till I'm gone, mother!" said Isabell. "Oh, if you would have patience! I'll no be long. I feel the wheel breaking at the fountain, and the silver chain being sundered, as the Bible says. When I'm gone, there will be nae motive for keeping up all this trouble. I've been making a terrible stir and commotion, I know that; no for me—and yet I mustna conceal the truth—I had some thought for myself, too; to die so young is sore enough without shame. But if God will have me bear shame, I must put up with it; and you must put up with it, Agnes. John's a good man; he'll never upbraid you with your poor sister, that ye did so much for; and you'll take my bairn. He'll never ken he had a mother but you—and you'll be good—oh, you'll be good to him! No, why should I greet?" she went on, looking with apparent surprise at a tiny drop that fell on her coverlet; "we must accept what God sends."

"Oh, hold your tongue, hold your tongue!" cried the mother; "God never sent wickedness. I'll no be contradictit in my own house—though, to be sure, it's no my house, for that matter. We were a' proud of your bonnie face, and your genty ways;

and our pride's had a fa'; yes, you may see, even your bonnie leddy that you were so sure of—your man's sister, as ye say—has come back no more. She's given ye up like a' the rest; and everybody will give ye up—till you humble yourself, Bell, and put away all your pretences, and do what Magdalen did. But naebody in heaven or earth will show mercy to a lie."

"Mother, you're that hard that ye make me sick," cried Agnes. "It's no a lie."

"Let her prove it, then!" said the mother solemnly She was in accord with Mr. Charles, with Fanshawe, with all others except Marjory, who had heard the tale. As for Agnes, she started up from her seat as if unable to bear any more.

"I maun be away again," she cried; "I canna stand it longer. If your grand leddies and your fine gentlemen will do nothing for her, I'll take up my work again, myself—and I'll clear ye yet, Bell. I'll away to Edinburgh this very day, and see John; maybe him and me can think of something else. I'm 'maist glad they've failed ye!" cried the girl, with tears in her eyes; "for now I'll never rest day or night till I've done it myself."

"You'll think first what you're doing," said the mother; "going to visit a man that has no heart to marry ye; mind what's happened to your sister, and take heed for yourself."

"Oh, woman!" cried Agnes, turning upon her wildly—while poor Isabell, struck by this unexpected assault, lay back upon her pillows feebly sobbing; and it was at this moment that Marjory knocked at the cottage door.

CHAPTER XV.

THERE could not have been a more striking welcome than the celestial glimmer of light which came over Isabell's countenance at this sight. She stayed her weeping with an effort, she held out her thin hands; she looked at the new-comer with pathetic delight.

"Oh, you've come, you've come at last!" she cried with an unconscious reproach. She was so weak that the fit of weeping which she had restrained, interrupted her by an involuntary long-drawn sob now and then, like the sobbing of a child and Marjory thought that this sobbing too was her fault.

"I thought you would never come," said Isabell, "it makes me nigh well to see you. Oh no, Miss Heriot, I'm no worse; I'm wearing away, wearing away, but no faster than everybody expected. Oh, it does me good to see you—to say your name."

"Did you ever hear of me—from—Tom?" said Marjory with hesitation, yet with a generous desire to make up for her late failure in interest. She had not melted into any familiarity as a more gushing nature might have done. Poor Iabell! this gave her an excuse to weep quietly, to expend her half-shed tears.

"Oh, I never called him by that name," she

said, "I daredna'. It was aye his desire I should, but I never could say anything but Mr. Heriot. I liked to say it; it seemed like himself, grander than me, far above me—I was never anything but Isabell. Yes, Miss Heriot, he said once how good ye were, and that, whoever was hard, you would be kind. He called you May—is that your name?"

"Yes, that is my name." Marjory could not unbend altogether, could not tell this girl, though her heart yearned towards her, to call her by that name, to call her sister, as so many effusive girls would have done. She answered quite simply and shortly without further expansion. Was it true that she would have been kind whoever had been cruel? Marjory had not much faith in herself so far as this was concerned. She remembered the horror which had taken possession of her when she had thought of this young woman becoming the mistress of Pitcomlie. All such feelings had fled away now; but yet she could not feel that Tom had any reason for his confidence in her. "I came to warn you, my poor Isabell," she said, "my uncle is anxious to come, to speak to you about all this; you must know that it is a very important matter for us. He is the only one remaining who has any right to interfere, and he wishes to come, to question you. He is an old man, and very kind; but he will not be satisfied unless he sees you himself; if it is not too much for you—"

"Oh," cried Isabell, with a long-drawn breath, "naething's too much for me! I'll be glad, glad to tell him all I can, to do anything I can to satisfy

him or you. It's hard to tell the truth and find nobody to believe you; but all I can do is to tell him, and leave the rest to God, Miss Heriot. Eh, what cause I have to trust in Him! A while ago I thought I never would hear the name again; and now there will be Heriots a' about me—you that are my kindest friend—and this gentleman. If it was not too much trouble, oh, might I see the bonnie little lady with the gold hair that Agnes says is like my baby? He's a Heriot too," said poor Isabell, with a wistful upward glance at Marjory's face. She was trustful, but yet afraid. She made a little fluttering movement towards something beside her in the bed, something that Marjory had not seen till this moment, and only divined now. "He's a Heriot too," the young mother pleaded, "oh, may I let you see him? If I once saw him in your arms I would be happy—"

"Bell!" said Agnes, in a voice of angry warning, "you said the bairn was to be mine, John's and mine—no an hour ago before this leddy came, you said it. It's her mainner and her voice and her flattering ways that have taken your heart."

"It's no that," said Isabell, "I'm doing you no wrong. You will be a mother to him, and he'll ken no other mother; but I would like Miss Heriot to take him just once in her arms, just to give him a kiss for his father's sake, just to see if he's no like his father. If it was no more than that—no to take him from you that have the best right—"

"My daughters, mem, are not civil to me," said the old woman coming forward for the first time.

"You hear the one say that's it the other that has the best right; yet this bairn was born under my auld roof, and put first into my auld arms, me that bore his mother, and bred her up by the toil of my hands and the sweat of my brow. They think I've naething to do with it; that I'm to sit by and hear him given away from one to another and never say a word."

"It's John and me," said Agnes breaking in, "that can do best for the bairn."

"And who will love him best?" said the old mother, "you will have bairns of your ain. You will push him by and make no account of him. He will have the orphan's fate. He will eat the bread of tears, he will have to bide in his corner, and haud his tongue, and walk wary, wary, lest worst should befall him."

Here Isabell turned with a cry to the unconscious infant at her side. They pierced her gentle soul with a hundred poisoned arrows without meaning it. Poor people do not build up foolish pictures of possible recovery round their dying up to the last moment, as some of us do. They never throw any sort of doubt upon that certain and near approaching termination. Not even a charitable suggestion that she might live to watch her child's growth was made by any one; nor did Isabell expect it. Perhaps on the whole this was the most real kindness, and it was the only treatment she had ever been used to; but yet in her delicate soul, she felt the want of tenderness without knowing how it was.

Meanwhile Marjory sat by bewildered, and listened to this dispute in confusion. She tried to interrupt them more than once, but their eager voices were too much for her. The strife was a generous strife in its way; but was it possible that they did not know if his mother's marriage was proved what the child must become at once? She interposed at last as calmly as she could.

"If all the proof is obtained that will be necessary," she said, "if the marriage is proved, and everybody satisfied" (at these words Isabell turned round, took her hand and kissed it gratefully, while her mother retreated to the furthest corner, persistently shaking her head, and uttering sighs that were deep enough to be groans), "then I think our family will have to be consulted. It is not quite so simple as you think. There will be something also for us to do."

The old woman came back from her corner of the room, and Isabell turned wistful, smiling, beaming upon the speaker.

"Oh," she said, "it was what I aye hoped, but I daredna ask. My wee man will not have the hard life we've all been born to? Oh, I'm joyful, joyful of that! not for the money, Miss Heriot; but if you knew the difference of him and you, folk that have been gently nurtured as they say in books, from the like of us; gently nurtured, that's what I would like —learned to speak soft, and think of others' feelings, and move quiet and be like him and you. Without money that cannot be; if he's to be

brought up to work for his living like the rest, that cannot be."

"If you mean the rest of my bairns, Isabell," said her mother, hotly, "your wean will be real well off if he's like them. An honest working man may look any gentleman in the face. I've aye trained ye up to that."

"Ay, mother," said Isabell, "that's very true; but a gentleman's son is no like a ploughman's son; and oh, if my boy might be like his father! They'll no let me speak of his father; but Miss Heriot, I may to you."

"Yes," said Marjory, faintly. A fastidious cloud had come over her again. Tom, poor Tom, had not been to her an ideal being; it seemed to her that his education, and the result of it, might both be improved in a new human creature. But poor Isabell thought differently; a new world opened before her eyes, which were full of tears, grateful tears, made sweet by an unexpected and unlooked for gladness.

"Oh, if I could live to see it!" she sighed, with a quivering smile. It was the first time that such a possibility had occurred to her. She threw a wistful glance into the future, which she must never see, and for one moment longed to live. Then for another moment the tears turned salt and bitter. "But that mayna be," she added, still more low. No, she could not live to see it; but still this sunset gleam had given a gentle radiance to her life.

"A little siller is aye a good thing. I'm very

glad the bairn's provided for," said the old woman, looking at Marjory keenly. Pride kept her from further inquiry; her ears were keenly open, and her mind intent to find out more fully what was meant; but she would have died sooner than ask a question. Somehow, however, this simple speech of Marjory's changed the aspect of affairs to Isabell's mother. It gave a probability to the story of the marriage, which it had never hitherto possessed in her eyes; the moment that money is involved it gives reality to everything. The old woman's feeling was very different from that vague sense of beatitude with which Isabell herself regarded the possibility of her child's future wealth; but Marjory was instantly aware of the deepened interest, the increased disposition to believe the story true. She went on to comment on what news she had of the search in which everything was involved.

"The gentleman you saw," she said, addressing Agnes, and feeling, to her great annoyance, that she blushed, "has gone off in search of these people. He is to go to Guernsey; first and in the meantime we have put advertisements in all the papers for John Macgregor."

"Adver-tisements!" said Agnes, with dismay. "To give him notice that he may get out of the way and hide himself."

"Why should he get out of the way and hide himself?"

"It is how they aye do," said Agnes, obstinately adhering to her own theory. "Whenever a man is wanted for anything, that's what aye happens. And

I would do it myself. If there was an adver-tise-ment for me in the papers, I would leave my place, or change my lodgings in a moment. Eh, that would I! I would not let myself be taken in a net. And John Macgregor's no a fool—no such a fool as to come for an advertisement. Na, Miss Heriot, it would have been better to have left it to me."

The mother drew near, also interested in this question. It was the first time she had taken any distinct interest in it.

"I ken naething about it," she said, "but put-ting a man's name in the papers is like sending a hue and cry after him. I ken John Macgregor, though I put nae trust in him. Ye'll never tell me that he'll be brought back by that."

"No," said Agnes. They both came near, and stood by shaking their heads; while Isabell, with a face which gradually grew more and more keen with anxiety, raised her eyes to Marjory, and put her thin hands together.

"It's my last hope," she said.

Perhaps there was just enough of old-fashioned prejudice in Marjory's own mind to agree with them a little, and she knew how strong that prejudice was amongst this class. But somehow the protest thus made against her proceedings roused in her again the fastidious and fanciful disgust which only occurred to her mind after she had thrown her whole heart into this effort.

"Well," she said, somewhat coldly, "if what I do is unsuccessful, you can then take it back into your hands. We can only adopt the means we

think best. It is not my place to interfere at all; all my friends have told me as much."

"Oh, dinna say that!" said Isabell, with appealing eyes. They all fought over this patient, unresisting creature. To all of them it was a secondary matter—to her it was life and death. In the pause that ensued she was driven almost to despair. All that her imagination could conceive she had already done. She had told her tale, she had opened her heart, she had thrown herself upon their sympathy, she had appealed to them by every argument in her power. The only thing yet remaining to her she did now. With a sudden movement, which was almost too much for her weakness, she lifted the infant by her side, and thrust it, without any warning, into Marjory's arms. Partly it was a simple artifice to prevent the possibility of a refusal, and partly it was the hurry of weakness which made this act so rapid. "This is—his bairn," said poor Isabell, falling back upon her pillow, and closing her pale eyelids. The tears stole softly out from under those lids, the hectic colour faded from her face. She turned her head aside, as if to avoid seeing the failure of her last experiment. And the others stood looking on with keen interest, with feelings vaguely quickened, with a sense of reality in the whole matter such as they had never felt before.

Marjory was disconcerted more than she could say. She was not used to young children. She had almost a repugnance to this morsel of humanity suddenly thrust into her arms—this creature, which

should have come into the world amid the clamour of rejoicing, which should have been its mother's pride, the hope of an old family, the inheritor of wealth and influence, and a kind of power. At the present moment it was its mother's shame; it was the shame of the dead man who had made no provision for it in this world, who had allowed it to be supplanted in his heedlessness, and made its future insecure; and over the child's existence a certain cloud of shame must always hover: legitimate indeed, but legitimate only by that expedient to make guilt less guilty—making only a hairbreadth escape from humiliation and ignominy. The baby was fast asleep; it was warm and downy like a little nestling taken suddenly out of the nest. Even the rapid movement did not disturb its utter calm. It lay on Marjory's lap, among the circle of agitated spectators, rapt in an absolute tranquillity which went to the heart of these women. The old mother began to weep. Agnes stood by with hungry eyes, ready to snatch the child from the stranger, who was as closely related to it as she, but who was an interloper, having nothing to do with it, she felt; while Marjory sat still, without touching it, with the long white dress streaming over her black one, looking into its sleeping face. Another scene came over her with a flood of recollection, mingling itself somehow in this one, giving to it an added effect. Once before an infant like this had been placed in her arms by a dying mother. The child was Milly, who since then had been as her own child to the elder sister; and the tears rushed all at once like a

stream in flood to Marjory's eyes as she recognised the likeness. It was as if Milly had been sent back again into babyhood; little rings of soft golden hair clustered about the baby head, the little face was waxen in its paleness, but every feature was like Milly. She kissed it with an enthusiasm which carried away all her repugnance.

"I will bring Milly to see you to-morrow," she cried, hastily; and then as she looked other likenesses stole upon her. A shadow of her father's face before suffering bowed him down, and of both "the boys," in those nursery days which came up so clear and fresh like a picture before her. Both the boys! Charlie most, perhaps, whose own child was not like him. Marjory's tears began to fall heavily on the little white nightdress made by poor Isabell's failing fingers with all the nicety which love could suggest. She forgot how all three were watching her eagerly, waiting for every word she said. She held the child close as it lay in serenest sleep, unconscious of her scrutiny, its pearly little hands spread out in that ease of perfect repose which denotes at the same time perfect health and comfort. "He is a true Heriot," she cried, "God bless him!"

"And God bless you!" said pale Isabell, from her bed, with a gleam of joy over her worn face, which looked like sunshine. Agnes walked away with a trembling thrill of jealousy and keen displeasure. But the mother drew nearer.

"If the bairn is provided for, it will aye be something," she said.

Who could have divined what a strange little scene was going on in the dim cottage room, where so many different emotions surrounded that one passive and peaceful thing which slept through all —the little creature, possessing nothing in life but the soft, almost noiseless breath which rose and fell, regular, measured, unbroken, like a soft strain in music? Certainly the other group approaching the cottage thought nothing of it as they straggled across the rocks, each taking his own way, and occupied with his or her own thoughts. They reached the door just when Marjory had risen and was replacing the sleeping baby in the warm nest from which he had been taken. She was stooping over the homely bed. Nothing could be poorer or more humble; but Marjory had forgotten all this. Her pride and pangs of revulsion had all gone from her; so had any doubts or difficulties that had ever crossed her mind.

"You must live, you must live, Isabell!" she was saying, scarcely aware of what she said.

And the poor young mother lay back upon her pillows with the countenance of one beatified. She shook her head quietly, but a wavering light had come into her face like the far-off glimmer of some lamp of hope that flickered somewhere in the distance. She had given herself up to death with that gentle resignation which is peculiar to the young and the poor; but she was young, and perhaps a voice powerful enough, the voice of a great joy, might yet call her back from the dangerous brink.

It was at this moment that a loud summons

came to the door. It startled them all, and Agnes and her mother had a brief but earnest discussion as to whether the applicants should be admitted. Marjory paid but little attention for the first moment. She drew her shawl round her, and wiped the traces of tears from her eyes, and rose to go away before the visitors, if there were visitors, should appear. But her attention was roused when she heard what voice it was which asked admittance when the knocking had remained for some time unheeded.

"Is there any one in? Open the door, open the door!" said the new-comer.

It was Mr. Charles. A murmur of other voices with him came in like a faint chorus; and once more quickly and eagerly came the knocking at the door.

CHAPTER XVI.

Mr. Charles had been seated all alone in the library of his house, a room which confused him much, seeing that it was a library, full of books, such as they were, yet not his, nor like anything that could have been his. Had he been condemned to sit much in this room, it would have been impossible for him to rest without remodelling and changing it; but thanks to golf and the club, he was not tempted to remain for too long a time at one sitting. This day, however, accident, which interferes with golf as much as with other things, had broken up one of the most promising matches ever arranged, and left Mr. Charles disconsolate. He came home to seek Marjory, and found Marjory gone; even little Milly had her own engagements; and he was thus left to himself. It gave him a realization of the time which might come, if Marjory were to marry, for instance, and he childless, daughterless, with nobody to make any house feel like home, might be left to the cold comfort of George's Square. He did not like the idea. He sat down in the library, as we have said, with a statistical work before him—dry reading, but he felt still more dry. He was out of his element, absent from his favourite surroundings, alone; and

everything was against him. How could he tell if he should ever again find himself comfortably established in his sunny old tower, in the room which he had garnished and arranged so carefully with all the accumulations of his life? "These young women" were about to pull down his old tower about his ears; or if they could be stopped in that, here was this other story, this strange marriage of Tom's, this peasant aspiring to the name of Heriot, with her child, who would bring into the old house the unknown qualities of some nameless race. And Marjory, with her head full of this nonsense, leaving him just at the moment he wanted her most, to mix herself up with such a business! And Fanshawe, an English ne'er-do-weel—Tom's friend, no doubt, and not a bad fellow, but far from the sort of person to match with Marjory—brought into it, head and shoulders! No wonder Mr. Charles was put out. The statistical book, too, indulged in statements about Fife which made every drop of blood in his body boil separately; statements which he could not absolutely contradict, yet which he felt were untrue, and would not have believed had an angel from Heaven proclaimed them. He was reading something particularly offensive about the fishers of the East Neuk itself, and fuming over it, when the maid came to the door to say that some one outside was asking for Miss Heriot.

"They're awfu' disappointed to hear she's no in," said the woman. "They have the look of decent folk, as if they had come a long way. Maybe you would see them, Sir, and no disappoint the

poor bodies? Miss Heriot is aye awfu' polite and ceevil to poor folk."

"Miss Heriot, I hope, is polite to everybody," said Mr. Charles. "You may show them in if their business is urgent. But stop; if it's only charity, or that sort of thing—"

"Eh, no, Sir; they're no folk to want charity," said the woman, dismayed at the suggestion.

And, half unwillingly, half pleased to get quit of himself and his loneliness, and the statistics, Mr. Charles closed his book, and prepared to receive the strangers. There was a little controversy at the door, as he could hear, as to which should enter first, which was quite audible. The woman would have yielded the *pas* to her lord; but while her modesty was slightly artificial, that of the man was perfectly genuine in its unalloyed loutishness.

"Gang you in, gang you in first; you've aye a word ready, right or wrong; and me, I canna speak," the bass voice grumbled, as the little struggle ended in the most natural way, and the wife appeared at the door.

This amused Mr. Charles to start with; and it was with benevolent kindness in his look, that he invited his visitors to approach.

"Miss Heriot, my niece, is out. Come forward, come forward. You can tell me your business," he said.

The pair came in accordingly; a rustic pair, she advancing with bashful self-possession, he hanging behind in her shadow. They were middle-aged people; the man grizzled and ruddy, the woman a

comely housewife, with a cheerful countenance which belied her timid gait. She advanced to within a few paces of the library table, at which Mr. Charles sat.

"You see, Sir, we've come a long way. It's no but what we would have waited for the leddy; but my man there was struck to hear it was a leddy, and thought maybe that in any case there would be mair comfort to his mind in seeing the maister—"

"Na, Jean; na Jean," said the man; "that was nane of my thought; it was your ain."

"And what matter which of us it was?" said the woman, "the gentleman no heeding about us; and it's mair decent-like to put it on the man, the head of the house. He thought, Sir, it would be mair satisfaction to see you, being a responsible person, than a young leddy, that's apt to take fancies in their heads."

"That may be, that may be," said Mr. Charles, not displeased; "though Miss Heriot is not one of that kind; but you were not to be expected to know. I'll be glad to hear your story, and do what I can for you."

"Oh, Sir, we're no folk that are wanting anything," said the woman; "we're well enough off, for that matter. My man is gamekeeper with Mr. Eclles, of the Langholm, and much thought of; with a cottage and a coo, and as little to complain of as we can expect in this weary world. My eldest lass is in service, and the second lad, he helps his father; and as for him that's out in the world——"

"Was it about them you wanted to speak to Miss Heriot?"

"No, Sir, I canna say it was," she answered, with a slight air of offence. "It was something altogether different; no concern of ours, as my man says."

Here the man interposed, plucking at her shawl.

"Jean, say it was in the papers, and be done wi't. What's the use of so many words?"

"Bravo!" said Mr. Charles; "you are a sensible man. Now, let us hear it; and be so good as to be brief, my good woman, for I must be on the Links at half-past four."

Mr. Charles grew quite energetic and brisk as he spoke. There is nothing an idle man loves like this playing at business—those fictitious bonds of engagements, appointments, and all the pretences at an occupied life, which when they are real, constitute a heavy bondage. He seemed to feel himself a most important member of society as he specified the hour at which he must be gone. The man obeyed this suggestion, once more nudging his wife; but the woman, with livelier instinct, was through it.

"We might come again," she said; "another day, maybe, when the gentleman is no engaged."

"I can give you my time till a quarter-past four," said Mr. Charles; and then there followed a little consultation between his visitors, a controversy as to how to state their case.

"It was about an advertisement in the papers. There's nae telling the meaning of an advertisement.

It was something that was to be to the advantage of the person—"

"Ah! you are John Macgregor then," Mr. Charles said, with instant brightening up of all faculties, and great internal contentment that he was the first to hear.

"I'm no saying that. It's ane we have heard of —ane we ken, mair or less," said the woman; "a poor man that's aye busy, and has little time to spare. We were to find out for him what it was about. Hold your tongue!" she said, turning round upon her husband. "Am I the one to speak, or am I no?"

"Oh, ay! you're the one to speak; but you've ower mony phrases," said the husband, muttering.

The wife turned round upon Mr. Charles with an air of compassion.

"Ye'll no mind his grumbling, Sir. It's my man's way. He has real sensible thoughts, but an ill way of expressing them. A' that comes from me is really from my man; but the words aye fail him—"

"They don't seem to fail you," said Mr. Charles.

"Na, never!" muttered the husband behind backs.

"The Lord be praised!" said the woman; "what would become of the house and the bairns if there was not some person that had sense enough to speak when there was occasion for't? But as I'm saying, this man in the advertisement—It's a long way off for him to come, and as we were in the town for our ain concerns, we gave him our word

we would ask. It's maybe about some poaching business; though that's a queer thing for a young leddy to take in hand."

"Does not the young lady's name suggest to you what the business may be?" said Mr. Charles, rousing up to this little conflict of wits, and feeling a sensible pleasure in thus being thrust as it were into the very front of the battle.

The two looked at each other.

"I told you so," said the woman.

"Then speak out; I'll no do it," said the man.

"Well, Sir," resumed the wife, "I ken just this much, that John Macgregor was ance in the service of a Mr. Heriot, a poor young gentleman that's dead, I hear? Eh, Sirs, to think how the young and the goodly die, and auld dry sticks aye live on and flourish! There's a man in our ain parish, sixty if he's a day, married upon a young lass—"

"That is not the question," said Mr. Charles with some heat, not liking the turn these remarks had taken. "If we were to keep to our business we'd get on all the quicker. This man was in the service of my nephew, Mr. Tom Heriot?"

"No altogether in his service. He keepit his dogs; he did an odd thing about the lodge now and then; he was just a serviceable person about the place."

"Well, well," said Mr. Charles, "since you know so much about him, you will probably know that something is supposed to have happened in Mr. Heriot's life there, about which his friends are anxious to have information."

"Now what could that be?" said the woman, putting up her hand to her forehead, with that natural artifice which we call theatrical. It was exactly what commonplace actors would have done in the endeavour to look puzzled, and full of candid simplicity. "What could that be? I'm no so instructed in Mr. Heriot's life as I might be. John, ye'll may mind something? But if you'll tell me what it is, Sir, I'll tell our—friend; no that's he just what you would call a friend."

"Your memory is so good that I am sure you could recollect were you to try," said Mr. Charles. "Of course, as it is my niece that wants to know, not me, I am not authorised to make any explanations."

"Eh me, what a pity the young leddy's no at hame!" said the woman with ingenuous regret.

"But," resumed Mr. Charles, "you know that there are sometimes connections which a young man forms, unpleasant things for the family. Young men will be young men, you know—and what's perhaps only the fancy of a day may leave results behind, and may bring great trouble into a family, If you had it in your power now to prevent a great deal of disturbance and heart-burning, and perhaps a law-suit, and the succession of an old estate from being disputed—I cannot tell—perhaps you know nothing at all about it—"

"Oh, my man kens a great deal more than he says. Now what can it be about, John?" said the wife.

In the meanwhile John was undergoing internal struggles of a very severe description. He was a

large brawny man, more slow in speech and heavy in aspect than men in his position, rubbed up into sharpness, at least, by contact with imperious sportsmen, generally are. He twisted his limbs so that he seemed all shoulder, he screwed up his features till he seemed all mouth.

"I'll no do it," he burst forth at length, "I'll no do it! I'll no wrong a poor lass, nor be mansworn!"

"What does the haverel mean?" cried Jean. "John!" shaking him violently, "you're falling into ane of your ill turns. Lord save the man! if ye dare to lay a finger on me!"

"I'll no do it!" cried John, stretching forth his arm with a clenched fist at the end of it, which might well have made the weaker creatures beside him tremble. Even Mr. Charles felt a nervous tremor go over him. Finesse and intellect grew pale in presence of brute force thus displayed.

"Gently, gently, my good man," he said, "you'll be forced to nothing. To tell what you know, that is all anybody wants of you. The law you know, if the worst comes to the worst, will make you do that; on the other hand, if you will give your information to the family and prevent going to law, it will be to your advantage; you see the difference; the court will give you nothing; that's all I have to say."

"Oh, dear me, dear me!" said the wife, wringing her hands. "Oh, John, is there nae way you can please the gentleman? You'll no be mansworn, my bonnie man! you'll no wrong the lass. Poor silly thing she's nigh her last by this time; and if the

gentleman is that anxious and was to make it worth our while? Often and often we've spoken of Canada, John. The lads would soon make their fortunes there with their talents. It would be to swear naething; it would be but to hold your tongue and that's so easy to some folk! the gentleman would be content if ye were but to hold your tongue. And where's the harm? Isabell, she canna live if she was to be made a queen—and it's no for your auld wife that you would throw away all the bairns' prospects? Oh, John, my bonnie man!"

The "bonnie man" paused irresolute; needless to say that the pair had entirely misconceived the object of the advertisement, and the service sought from them They had not thought it possible, or rather Jean had not thought it possible—for John's mind did not readily exercise itself on an abstract question—that "the family" could have any wish but to nullify, if possible, the irregular marriage; "no to get ourselves into trouble" had been the principle of the pair from beginning to end of the transaction, and they had kept themselves out of the way of Agnes, whose search after them they had heard of. "We'll get ourselves into hot water, and you'll lose your place, and muckle Agnes Jeffrey can do to make it up to us," Jean had said. To swear falsely was a crime which neither of the two could have wound themselves up to; but to be silent! that was another matter. The tongue is an unruly member, doing much harm in the world; but to say nothing how good it is! Had Mr. Charles been a cynic he would have watched this self-con-

troversy to an end, and no doubt enjoyed it, as knowing how it must infallibly end; but Mr. Charles was no cynic; he preferred to interrupt the struggle before it ended in the subjugation of John's wavering virtue.

"Look here," he said suddenly and sharply, "and hold you your tongue, Mrs. Macgregor, I'm speaking to your man. You were present when my nephew, Tom Heriot, married a girl up in Strathmore, Isabell —what was her name? They took each other as man and wife in your presence? Answer me aye or no, is that true?"

"I was there too," cried Jean astonished. "I'm as sure a witness as him; we were both together in our ain kitchen, no heeding the two young fools. I said to Mr. Heriot, 'dinna do't'—but wha was to make the young gentleman mind me?"

"Then it's true? You've told me a lie to begin with, woman, and you were willing to tell me another. Man, it's for you to answer. Your name is John Macgregor, and it's true?"

"As sure as death, as true's the Bible. I'm no a man of many words like her, but naething would have made me mansworn!" said John, in the pleasure of being personally appealed to. "And I'll no deny my name. John Macgregor's my name, ance gillie to the laird in Strathmore, then odd man about the Moors doing whatever turned up—then—"

"It's a speat when it comes," said Jean composedly, folding her hands upon her bosom and regarding Mr. Charles with a vindictive pleasure, "you've brought it on yoursel."

"This then is what is wanted of you," said Mr. Charles hastily. "To prove this; not to go away, as you thought, and hold your tongues, and dishonour a woman, and wrong a bairn; what you've got to do is to prove this. Hold your tongue, woman—"

"Eh, Mr. Heriot!" cried the irrepressible Jean, "I've heard of the Heriots that they were kind; but, oh, what a blessed family to uphaud the marriage and right the lass! And it'll be something to our John's advantage," she added insinuatingly, "just the same? for though it's hard to haud your tongue it's sometimes just as hard to speak out and say a' the truth; and if we were to get ourselves into trouble in our new place—"

"Make your wife hold her tongue, John!" said Mr. Charles. "You can go to the kitchen, both of you, and get something to eat; and then I'll take you out to see the young woman—I'm meaning Mrs. Tom Heriot, my nephew's wife; and we'll settle this business—as it is not a pleasant business—once for all."

"We're to go and see—Isabell?" asked Mrs. Macgregor, faltering.

"I said Mrs. Tom Heriot, my nephew's wife."

"Come, Jean, haud your tongue; the gentleman wants none of your clavers!" said John, giving a vigorous tug to her shawl.

But Jean lingered; she took a few steps towards the door, and then turned back.

"Ye'll no say naething to Isabell of what we were speaking o'—nor of the proposition to gang to

Canada and hold our peace. Oh, Sir, you'll no say anything?"

"It was your proposition, Mrs. Macgregor, not mine!" said Mr. Charles.

"Aweel, aweel, Sir, what does it maitter? How was I to know you were such a good gentleman? Eh, so few as is like you! but you'll no say anything? It was a' from a good motive—for my ain bairns' sake, and to keep dissension out of a family, and to pleasure you—"

"Go away, go away!" said Mr. Charles with a smile, which he tried hard to conceal; and a short time after he set out with his two strange companions for the Spindle, to find the cottage where Isabell was. This was the interruption which broke in upon Marjory when deeply touched and half-weeping, she sat with Tom's child upon her lap, and her heart going back into her own childhood —when Tom, too, was a child. The knocking at the cottage door was not a more harsh interruption of the stillness than was the other interruption, which was about to come into this sad yet exciting chapter of her life.

CHAPTER XVII.

MEANWHILE Fanshawe had been passing his time very uncomfortably, on the whole, wandering about the Channel Islands the first part of his journey, and asking himself half dolefully, half with a certain rueful amusement whether his next stage should be Australia or New Zealand. He had written to Marjory from London, where he returned within three days of his precipitate departure; but he had not had courage enough to write to her since, having felt that he must wait for something to tell. It would be difficult to describe the effect produced upon Fanshawe's mind by his late interview with her. She had disappointed him by her pre-occupation, wounded him by what he could not but feel to be indifference to himself, and by the almost harsh readiness to take advantage of him, and employ him in her service, which she had shown. A man may be very ready to say that he will go through fire and water to serve the lady of his affections, and may mean it; but when that lady sends for him abruptly, and lays her commands upon him, calling him frankly, not for his sake, but because he can be of use—not all the serviceableness in the world will prevent the man from feeling that this is hard upon him. That no woman can accept such

services without—one way or other—paying for them, is a consolation which suggests itself only to the calculating and cold-blooded lover. The generous soul that offers itself without hire or reward is very apt to despair of remuneration; but even while taking the yoke upon him, it is disagreeable for a man to feel that it is not him, but the use of him, that a woman wants. This was Fanshawe's feeling; he was glad to do all that man could do for her; but yet to be simply made use of was hard. And after all, Tom Heriot, and the Heriots generally, were so little to him in comparison with Marjory! But with these feelings there mingled some which were very different. He felt a respect for her, because she was able to resist all that vague fascination which subjugated himself; he admired her insensibility; it seemed well that a woman such as she, should be slow to be won—if ever she could be won by such a man as himself, which Fanshawe felt to be unlikely enough. Sometimes he had moments of great depression on this score, and felt that the idea was not one to be entertained or thought of; and then again the atmosphere of dreams would steal over him, that atmosphere which envelops everything in a sweet mist and uncertainty, where nothing is sure, and all is possible. Her very decision, her energy, the way in which she had sent him forth—though he did not like it—increased his admiration of her. It was so unlike himself; so much better than himself. And the little fluctuations of temper, the shades of offence, of withdrawal, of partial anger, which showed themselves

when he did not agree with her, or was not rapid enough in following her conclusions, were sweet to him, sweeter than all her excellences. These imperfections gave him something to forgive in her, something to indulge, to throw the great golden mantle of Love over, and—no, not to forget. The flaws were the last thing he wanted to forget; but if there had been any chance for him of getting free of Marjory's fetters, that last chance had floated away, when she sent him upon this unpalatable quest. It seemed to him needless, it was unpleasant; and yet how it bound him with chains, which he could not and did not wish to break!

Men do not like to feel themselves inferior to a woman; but there are kinds of inferiority which a man in love may put up with—and to Fanshawe it seemed that Marjory would be to him what the soul is to the body, what inspiration is to the soul. This was how he put it, saving his own pride. It was not that she would do anything for him, but that she would stimulate him into doing; she would inspire him, he felt; she would bring all his buds of meaning into flower, and work within him a realization of those intentions which arose so often in his mind, and came to nothing when they rose. Through all his journeys he kept thinking of her in this strain. She would be his inspiration. He could do something—something vague, he did not know what—but something worth doing, under the impulse which she would give him. What would she say? Would it be possible for her to accept a rôle in life which was so little encouraging as that of trying to

put energy into him? Fanshawe did not ask himself this question—neither did he ask many more, which it would have been very well worth his while to ask. How, if she married him, they were to live; what he could do to make their marriage possible; where and how they were to establish themselves? these questions did not enter his mind—partly, perhaps, because he was still in the reverential stage of love, thinking of her vaguely as something better than all created things, yet impetuously too, as of something which could not be done without, which was necessary to existence. But perhaps it was, on the whole, because of his prevailing character of good-for-nothing that he was able to elude all the practical questions, and to let his love absorb him without any notion of how he could make the after-life possible. Besides, he said to himself, if ever the question crossed his mind, he could do nothing at this moment; she herself had made it impossible for him to do anything. Had she not sent him away from all the uses of life, from all the efforts which he might have been making towards something better—on this wild goose chase—for her? This afforded him an answer to every objection of his own thoughts, and with a certain humorous sense of the cleverness of such a response to all criticism, he used it in imagination even to herself. "What could I do? how could I do anything? You sent me away from rationality to hunt for a needle in a bottle of hay." This was the imaginary reply which he made to her imaginary fault-finding. Ah, if the matter were but so far advanced as that! Then he

would find a hundred answers, a hundred excuses. The only thing he would not be able to find—though this part of the subject he managed to elude cleverly—was any reasonable ground upon which to ask Marjory Hay-Heriot to marry him, or any feasible way of providing for her, should she be willing to share his fortune.

With these thoughts in his mind, and those other thoughts carefully excluded from it, he wandered about the smiling isles which are enclosed in so wild a sea. He went, as he thought, to every inn over their whole extent—from the smallest to the largest—encountering endless experiences (which were not all disagreeable), and seeing a great deal of novel life. And he found nothing—no Scotch face nor Scotch accent even met his eyes or ears—or when by accident they did, they belonged to some one who denied the name of Macgregor, and was not to be identified in any way with the man he sought. He was retiring disconsolately from his last attempt to discover this undiscoverable personage, and questioning himself ruefully as to which was the nearest way to New Zealand, when some one came up to him on the pier where he waited for the steamer—a ruddy, red-haired young man or boy, not more than twenty, freckled up to the roots of his hair, and with a shrewd but innocent face. He was one of the porters on the pier, and Fanshawe instinctively stole his portmanteau out of the way, to keep it from the clutches of this predatory personage. He was very much astonished to see the individual in question pushing towards him,

evidently with a purpose; and still more startled when the youth addressed him.

"You were asking, Sir, for ane of the name of Macgregor?" he said, interrogatively.

Fanshawe turned sharply round upon him.

"I was doing so," he said; "what of that? Have you anything to tell me about him?"

"I'm him," said the young man, "that's a'."

"You are he!" said Fanshawe, in dismay, gazing at the youthful countenance with a kind of horror. The lad put his hand to his hat with a comfortable smile, which told how far he was from any consciousness of offence.

"Ay, deed am I. I'm from Perthshire as my native place, and I've been here a year. Whatever you want wi' me it can be nae harm, for I've a conscience vide of offence; and folk tell me you've been looking for me, Sir, all through the island. There's no question ye can put that I winna answer. I'm feared for nothing. I have a conscience vide of offence."

Fanshawe was amused in spite of himself. "You might perhaps suit my purpose better if you were not quite so blameless," he said. "It cannot be anything so young as you that I want. Is your name John?"

"No," said the lad, "my name's Willie; but wait a bit, Sir, we'll maybe shuit you yet, a' the same. John's no my name, but it's my father's; and he's no so young nor so innocent as me. It might be him ye wanted?"

"Does he live here?"

"Na, he's no sae foolish as that, or sae enterprising, if that's a better word? He's weel off at home, and has nae inducement. He's one of the gamekeepers to Mr. Eccles, of the Langholm. Before that we used to live up in Strathmore, in the parish of Drumglen, no far from Stainbyers, where he was aye glad of a job to attend upon gentlemen, either fishing or any kind of sport, and to take the charge of their dogs when they had dogs, or of their horses—and keep guns and rods in order—or even to give a hand at the lodge."

"That will do," said Fanshawe, in sudden delight. "Give me your father's address."

But here the lad paused. "He's in a responsible position now," he said, "a man with a great trust; he's risen in the world. If ye could tell me what you wanted with him, I'll write. It might be something that wadna be consistent with his position. I'm but twenty; I'm no heeding what I do; but my father's had a hard struggle with the world, and now he's got the better o't, he maunna compromise himself. I'll write and get an answer if you'll tell me what it is you want."

Fanshawe had to exercise all his eloquence to overcome these delicate scruples The lad was his mother's son; but finally he got the information he wanted, and departed with a light heart in the steamer, carrying that precious address (already found out, though he did not know it) carefully enshrined in his pocket-book like a treasure. He was on his way to Marjory with this information on the very afternoon in which Mr. Charles trudged

along the shore with his long legs, outstripping his companions. It would have been wiser, no doubt, to have gone and sought out the Macgregors at once, but Fanshawe, who was thinking little of the Macgregors, and much of Marjory, preferred to go to St. Andrews to let her know how promptly he had executed her commission. Travelling is not rapid in Fife; he had to make his impatient way through a network of railways, one interlacing the other, and leaving the unfortunate traveller an hour's waiting here and there, at all sorts of out-of-the-way stations. His feelings during these delays need not be described; but he was compelled to submit, as all forlorn Britons are compelled to submit, to the vagaries of the railway companies. But for this he would have reached St. Andrews with his address, in time to join the party which had forestalled him. His information, of course, was not of the least importance by the time he reached his destination. He was just a few hours too late, as people so often are, but luckily he was unaware of the fact, and waited for Marjory in the room which was full of her presence, with a flutter at his heart, which prevented him from thinking very seriously of anything. He sat down by the window where he had seen her sitting, and looked out upon the sea and sky against which he had watched the outline of her features, thinking it like the picture of a saint; and all the surroundings, which were full of her, filled up the heart of the man with such a soft enchantment that for a long time he was not even impatient. She was not certain to be gracious to him, but the

scene was gracious, full of her breath and influence, and permitted him to wrap himself in the shadow, as it were, of her presence, embracing him gently with all the corners and all the draperies that were fresh from her touch, enveloping him in all the nameless associations of the place in which she lived. For a long time he yielded himself up to this fascination, finding a subtle pleasure in it which stole all his strength from him, until the long shadows of the evening began to deepen, and the maids came to communicate their wonder to him. The dinner hour had arrived, and not even Mr. Charles had come home. They had gone by the shore towards the Spindle, both Miss Heriot and her uncle. Could anything have happened? Love is always fanciful, and takes fright upon any pretext. Could anything have happened? Fanshawe rushed out of the house in the subdued light of the evening, and set out over the cliffs at a pace which few people could have kept up with, fearing he knew not what, and not venturing to ask himself what he feared.

At the same hour, on the same afternoon, another visitor was entering St. Andrews, coming down from the higher ground inland upon the picturesque old town, and looking out anxiously for the first sight of its towers and ruins. Of all unaccustomed travellers this was Miss Jean Hay-Heriot, from the High Street of Comlie, in a black bonnet big enough to take in her lace "borders"—with her keen eyes noting everything along the unaccustomed road, which yet she knew so well. To visit St. Andrews

at all, was a wonderful effort on her part; but to visit it at so late an hour that she and her old horse and rusty coachman must be compelled to pass the night "in a strange place," was more wonderful still. The reason of her visit was, however, natural enough. Mr. Charles's mysterious intimations and hints of a mysterious something which was yet to be disclosed in his family, had already travelled over the length and breadth of Fife, with that amazing celerity which is peculiar to gossip of all kinds. It had reached Miss Jean's ears that day after her early dinner, when the Minister himself had "stepped across" to communicate the strange news, which he had learned at a meeting of Presbytery, in the most direct manner, from the Reverend Simon Stutters, of Kinnucher, who had it from Mr. Morrison, of St. Rule's, who had it from "auld Charlie" himself. The story, as was natural, had taken form and shape in these several transmissions, and now narrated circumstantially how Tom Heriot had been entrapped by the arts of a gamekeeper's daughter in the Highlands; how this designing creature had flirted, and held off and on, till she wound him up to the pitch of consenting to marry her privately; how then he went off in disgust and misery, and though popularly believed to have died of an injury to the spine got in the hunting-field, had in reality succumbed to the severer malady of a broken heart; and how there was now a baby produced, who was said to be Tom's heir, to the great trouble of the family.

"I hear there's a great body of witnesses all

ready to swear to it," said Dr. Murray; "but our old friend Charles, Miss Jean, as I need not tell you, is not of a very determined character, and perhaps if there was a bold front put upon it, we might hear another story. The worst is, there's nobody that I know of, unless it was a man of business, that has energy to take the matter up."

"Energy!" said Miss Jean, "it's not energy that's wanting. Marjory's a young woman, and will think it's not her place to interfere; but I'm not young to speak of, and I'll not see the old house pass to a gamekeeper's daughter without rhyme or reason. Hey, Bell! go and call John out of the kailyard, and bid him dress himself, and put to the horse. I'm going to St. Andrews; and put me up a change of linen, and a clean cap. Charlie's an old fool! but I hope you'll no say that I'm not a determined character, Doctor. I'll know the rights of this before I'm a day older—and she'll be a clever lass, cleverer than I have ever seen one of her kind, if she imposes upon me."

"My dear Miss Jean," said Dr. Murray, "we all bow to your sense and your experience; but these kind of cutties are often very clever. I would not encounter one of them myself unless it was strictly in the way of duty—and you know a lady—"

"Oh, ay! I know your opinion of a lady," said Miss Jean, "which is very pleasant, and very fine, if we were all under five-and-twenty; but when a woman comes to be five-and-seventy, as I'm saying, that makes a difference. Johnnie Hepburn, this will be sore news for your friends up at Pitcomlie," she

added, quickly turning, with a gleam of enjoyment, to the other visitor, who had been listening with consternation to the strange story. "Ye'll have a grand excuse to go and comfort Mrs. Chairles."

"I don't think my comfort is very much to Mrs. Charles," said Hepburn, with rising colour; "but surely you don't believe, for a moment, that such a story as this can be true."

"Why should I no believe it?" said Miss Jean. She was profoundly sceptical, but she could not relinquish the opportunity of demolishing her adversaries, "these young women" at Pitcomlie. "We're a great people, Johnnie, and Scotland, though she's small, holds up her head with the best, and for my part I know none that can hold a candle to her—"

"That's true—that's very true," said the Minister, "but when you think of all our spiritual advantages, and what Providence has done for us, it's a terrible addition to our responsibility. That is what I always think of—a land that has been so favoured for generations—"

"But," Miss Jean went on impatiently, "whether it is that some weakness is needful to show that we're always human—these customs about private marriages are an awfu' snare and burden. It's a wonder to me that half the families in the land are no rent asunder with irregular marriages. There's some special Providence, I've aye felt, that must watch over eldest sons. There never was one in our family that ever I heard of; and I ask your pardon, Dr. Murray, but Tom Heriot dying of a

broken heart is beyond me; we've tough hearts in our family—they stand a good tug. He might have taken to drinking, or some other vice, to make himself amends; but to break his heart! Na—na—that's more than I can believe."

"I tell you what was told to me," said Dr. Murray, "and no wonder, poor man. What would his father have said? and all his belongings? and the county that would never have taken any notice of him—and not the least, Miss Jean, you—"

"Me! He could have put up with the want of notice from me; the world, in general, is but little regardful of what's said by a cankered auld maid. Most likely," said Miss Jean with a twinkle of her bright eyes, "he would have said it was envy because I had never been married myself. But that's neither here nor there. If it's a determined character that's wanting, Doctor, I'm away to St. Andrews. Chairlie is as weak as water, as you say—and Marjory will be a fool, and will not like to move."

"Could I be of any use," asked Hepburn eagerly.

"In the interests of the other heir? Johnnie, my man, you're a fine lad," said Miss Jean, "and very accomplished. I do not know another man like you in all Fife for the piano and the like of that; but for a determined character—na—na—I'll go myself."

"I don't see what the piano has to do with it," said Hepburn angrily.

"Nor I either," said Miss Jean with a laugh, and she rang her bell, and gave her orders about her

change of linen in such simplicity of diction that her guests took their leave. "Half-a-dozen shifts, Bell, for you never know what may happen at my age. Lord bless me! am I to learn new-fangled words to save the Minister's modesty, forsooth—and what's more modest than a shift? As for Johnnie Hepburn, I don't doubt that he calls all his clothing by nasty French names. Give me good Scotch that's aye clean and wholesome; and bring me a cup of tea—and let the carriage be round in half-an-hour. I'm going on family business—you can say that to whoever wants to know."

"Eh! it's Miss May that's to be married!" said Bell, clapping her hands.

"You think that's something to be pleased at, you lightheaded taupie? When Miss May's married, there will not be one person of the name of Hay-Heriot worth their salt upon this earth—except me," said the old lady with moisture in her eyes, "and, oh! the old rag o' flesh and blood that I am! Go quick, and make up my bundle, you gaping thing! Miss May's no the fool to marry till she sees what's she's doing. I can see to that at the same time," Miss Jean added briskly as the maid left her. And with these double intentions she set out, meaning to dine comfortably at the end of her journey, and to carry confusion to the unrightful claimants of the old lands. But Miss Jean arrived to find the house empty, the dinner-table spread but vacant, the servants full of consternation. Miss Heriot must have fallen over the cliff—she must have been blown off the Spindle Rock—and Mr.

Charles, in the effort to save her, must have perished too. What so likely, it was known that they had gone in the same direction, and when no one came back for dinner, notwithstanding the well-known punctuality of the affrighted house?

CHAPTER XVIII.

YOUNG Hepburn went out of Miss Jean's door with a face full of offence and a heart full of trouble. He was not thinking much of himself, however, so that the offence was evanescent; he was thinking of *her;* yes, of that Her, who, however hastily, unreasonably, and without adequate cause, had come to be the representative of womankind to the young man, superseding Marjory and all ideals. Matilda was not an ideal woman; he could not worship her in that guise, nor put her into any shrine. It is needless for me to pause and remark upon the curious unsuitability of perhaps the majority of mortal unions, the way in which young men or young women prefer the individual least calculated to make them happy—and hold to that choice with an obstinacy worthy of the original folly. Poor Hepburn had been seized with this too common form of love-sickness; he was not blind; he saw well enough that Mrs. Charles was unlike anything that he had set before himself, in his days of imagination, as worthy of love; and already he had begun to say to himself that an ideal standard was folly; that a real human creature was above ideals; that to be genuine was best whatever the character of that reality might be. This was the first stage—afterwards he went further, and said to himself that

women were different from men; that justice was not to be expected from them, or an appreciation of anything above the ordinary level of facts; that they were not capable of understanding abstractions; that they were invincible to reason; and that after all, it was because she was so undauntedly foolish, so delightfully under the sway of her feelings, and had so different a way of judging—a method quite her own, and independent of law and rule—that men worshipped a woman. Yes, she was not as they are, she was a fool, and yet a goddess—to be petted, put up with, laughed at, admired, thought more of and less of than was possible to any other created thing. This was Hepburn's way, as it has been many another man's, of making up to himself for having given over his whole being to the sway of a foolish woman. He made out that all women were foolish, and idealized her meanness, not being able to fit her to the ancient ideal he had once possessed. Women, perhaps, when they choose badly, do something of the same kind; but they are seldom so general in their conclusions. For the most part, they have a hankering after the ideal, which makes them always capable of believing in a higher kind of man; but men make their convenient theory into a general truth which, perhaps, is one result of their superior power of understanding the abstract. To have loved a fool is sufficient reason with them to conclude that all women are fools—and so Hepburn did. No, Matilda was not an ideal woman; she was not like the high feminine types of being which poets have created; but she

was real, and all women were like *her;* from the old theory to the new there is but a step, and this step he had made unawares. He set off now with a heavy heart to Pitcomlie, feeling that he knew exactly what she would say, how she would burst out in denunciation of "the old family," and declare that it was all a plot to injure her and her child. And strange as it seemed to him, he knew that Matilda would put real faith in this; she would have no difficulty in believing that Mr. Charles and Marjory had hatched an iniquitous plot, and that lawyers and judges, and a crowd of honourable men, were accomplices in the scheme against her. It was the way of women. What he should have to do would be to soothe and to console—and he did not dislike the office. Her theories would be idiotic, her rage unreasonable; but she would be so pretty in her anger, so fascinating in her tears; and to soothe them away, to coax her back to quietness, would be so pleasant! Thus the foolish lover justified Providence, which provides silly women for the delectation of the world; he liked it better than if she had been a reasonable creature, and he said to himself that all women were alike, and that folly was the sweetest thing between earth and heaven.

Matilda was reclining on the sofa when he went into that drawing-room at Pitcomlie, which no longer bore the remotest resemblance to Marjory's drawing-room. The room was strewed with traces of the destructive tendencies of the little heir. He had been brought down by Verna, who felt it necessary, from time to time, to demonstrate how much the

young mother was devoted to her children; and it was Verna who had caused Tommy's gorgeous new rocking-horse to be placed in a corner of the drawing-room. But on this particular afternoon the young Laird had given decided indications of a will of his own; he had torn the mane of his rocking-horse out in handfuls of horse-hair, which was scattered all over the room. He had thrown about the sofa-cushions, and made ropes of the anti-macassars; he had cast down several glass vases, and one of old china, breaking them into millions of pieces. Finally, he had been sent away in disgrace, howling so as to be audible half way down the Comlie road, where Hepburn heard his shrieks; he hurried on in consequence, fearing hysterics, and was consoled to find it was only Tommy. The pretty mother lay on the sofa, fatigued with the passion which Tommy had driven her into. There were two patches of rose-red on her cheeks—traces of her excitement; and she held out her hand half-irritably, half-languidly to her visitor. "Oh, you have come at last;" she said, for he had not been at Pitcomlie the day before. Verna was sitting by with her account-books; she was making up the bills, and putting her affairs in order, and she was happy. The squabble with Tommy had not affected her.

"I was obliged to go to Edinburgh yesterday," said Hepburn humbly; "as I told you—to see my sister's trustees."

"Oh yes, I know!" said Matilda. "Business is always so much more important than anything else. You men will make any sacrifice to business—and

leave your friends in loneliness, without ever thinking once—"

"Were you lonely?" whispered the gratified Johnnie; "how good, how sweet of you to miss me! you never were out of my mind all day."

"Oh, that is what all you gentlemen say," said Matilda, with a little toss of her head. "As for your Fifeshire people," she went on, "I don't think much of them. But for a few cards that have been left, one would imagine there was nobody in the county. I don't know if it is their way here, or if it is that odious Miss Jean."

"I told you, Matty, when you were so rude to the Heriots—" said Verna.

"Oh, don't talk to me any more about that!" cried Mrs. Charles; "besides, I never was rude to the Heriots. They chose to take offence and go away; but was that any blame of mine? Was I to put myself at their feet, do you suppose, in my own house?"

"Have you heard anything of them lately?" asked Hepburn, with a certain solemnity in his tone and manner, which he tried vainly to banish. Verna looked up at him quickly, being more open to impression than her sister, and was the first to reply.

"Is there anything to be heard?" she said, looking at him.

Matilda's languor was a great deal more safe than the keen alertness of the other.

He answered, "No, oh no!—I suppose not, since you have heard nothing," with some confusion.

It was the very best way of broaching the subject; but his confusion was real, and he did not think of that.

"Since we have heard nothing?" said Verna, raising herself to a very upright position. She had never been perfectly easy since Dr. Murray had thrown, quite inadvertently, into her mind that suggestion of another heir.

"Well," said Hepburn, with some impatience, "I have no double meaning. I supposed there must be nothing to hear as you have not heard. Otherwise, I have just been listening to a story—"

"What story?"

It was strange that Matilda kept silent so long; she was cowed, I suppose, by Verna's harsh and peremptory tone.

"They say," said Hepburn, hesitating, and sinking his voice involuntarily; "indeed, I do not believe it, I give no credence at all to it. They say that Tom Heriot was married privately, and that there is a child—"

"What is that?" said Matilda, rousing up. "Tom Heriot married—and a child? Oh, what a wicked, wicked story! Oh, Mr. Hepburn, how can you say so, when you know, as well as I do, that we heard quite different, that it was all settled when the will was read, and that Tommy was the only heir—the only, only heir, everybody said. How can you make up such a story? It is only to frighten me, and make me unhappy. You know you don't mean what you say."

"Indeed," said poor Johnnie, abject in the

penitence for which he had no cause. "I would not make you unhappy for the world. I thought it right to tell you as I heard—but I don't believe it. It will turn out to be a mere invention, of that I am sure; but as I had just heard, I wanted to find out whether you knew."

"Of course we know to the contrary," said Matilda, laying herself back, somewhat excited, upon her pillows, satisfied so far with the explanation, and only angry with Johnnie in a coquettish tormenting way. But Verna, who had no such confidence, restrained her feelings, keeping her anxiety under. She was a great deal more anxious than her sister, and understood much better all that was involved.

"For simple curiosity, Mr. Hepburn," said Verna, "tell us what they say."

"Oh, it is just what is always said," he answered. "Tom Heriot, they say, was privately married—married irregularly, as sometimes happens in Scotland—"

"What sort of a thing is that—before the registrar, or something?"

"Oh, not so formal. In Scotland," said Hepburn, "if two people were to say to each other, before us, for instance, 'This is my husband, and this is my wife,' they would be supposed to be married."

"Supposed! but what would that matter? It would be no marriage at all."

"I thought there was always a blacksmith," said Matilda, from her sofa, laughing. "When there

were Gretna Green marriages, there was always a blacksmith. I have heard of that. It must have been such fun, much greater fun than an ordinary wedding, with a breakfast, and just the same things as everybody else has."

"It would be no marriage at all," repeated Verna, with a certain harsh earnestness. "You hear me, Mr. Hepburn? No marriage at all!"

"Unfortunately, as much a marriage as though it had been done by an Archbishop," said Johnnie; "that is what they say; but I don't think Tom Heriot was the man to do it. I don't think there is any fear. I feel sure that, if there had been anything in it, they would have let you know first of all. It would be only your right; for there is nobody so deeply concerned."

"Of course we should have been the first to hear," said Verna, coldly.

She went back to her account-books, closing the subject, and adding up a line of figures by way of proving to herself how calm she was. The effort was successful so far as Hepburn was concerned; but Verna did not convince herself. After a few minutes' absorption in the books, she rose in a fever of suppressed emotion, and went slowly out of the room, wrapping herself, as it were, in a cloak of sudden self-restraint. How she trembled! how cold she had grown suddenly, though it was a day in Summer! The other two did not notice her, being absorbed in their own comedy; but this was tragedy to Verna. The fact that she might have spared herself the trouble of such energetic self-

repression, and that neither of her companions had taken the trouble to think of her at all, did not affect her, as it might have affected a more sympathetic spirit. What afflicted her was no sentimental sorrow, but real heavy misfortune—the loss of a life. Yes, she felt that it was her life that was threatened, not Matilda's fortune, or the patrimony of naughty little Tommy; it was she who was threatened, not they. She went out in a kind of despair, and sat down in a corner of the rocks, from which she could see the old house against which she had meditated such treason. It seemed to her that some magical power must attend that wretched old place. Had she ever prospered since she proposed to meddle with it? She shivered as she looked at it, feeling as though it were a wizard, or a wizard's dwelling. Poor Verna! the tears came into her eyes, intense and bitter. To be sure it was only a report; Hepburn did not put any faith in it—nay, treated it as a simple piece of gossip; but to Verna, as to many women, the pain of it was its best authority. It would be so miserable a change, so dreadful a loss and misfortune, that somehow, according to the nature of things, it must be true.

In the meantime Matilda, from her sofa, began to claim the sympathy of her devoted admirer.

"Oh! Mr. Hepburn," she said, "if this were true! What should I and my poor children do if this were true? I should have nothing—nothing but my pension and the two children to bring up—boys,

too! And oh! my poor little Tommy! my little heir! What should I do?"

It was on Hepburn's lips to say that she would still have her husband's portion, the inheritance of the younger son, to fall back upon; but to console this gentle, disconsolate creature with mercenary suggestions of eight thousand pounds, seemed a miserable thing to do. He took her hand instead, and comforted her, and bid her not to fear.

"There are many that would be but too proud, too happy to be of use to you," he said. "Everything I have in the world—everything! though it is not much—"

"Oh, Mr. Hepburn! you are too good," murmured Matilda, and then she proceeded with her complaint. "Verna would leave me, I know," she said, "Verna has no feeling for anything above account-books. You saw how she kept adding them up, even when you were telling me of this dreadful report. That is her sphere—fussing about a house, and having the control of the bills and all that. I have often said, what a pity it was that we were not quite poor, for then Verna might have gone out as a housekeeper and been happy. We never were rich," she added, with that frankness that went to Hepburn's heart, "but still ladies can't do such things. It is a pity, though I don't think I ever could be—a governess, for instance, though I may perhaps require to do something for my poor children. Oh, Mr. Hepburn! don't be too kind to me. Don't take my hand and that. It isn't—nice; for you know I am not a young girl, as some people

might think, to look at me; but a poor widow—with no one to love me."

Here Matilda's tears overcame her—she covered her face with her handkerchief. She suffered Johnnie to do what he liked with her hand; and poor Johnnie moved beyond all control, overcome by her beauty and her tears, and her helplessness; touched by love at once, and chivalrous sympathy for her weakness and distress—Johnnie did what any such tender-hearted soul was sure to do. He threw himself on his knees by the side of the sofa—he laid himself and all his possessions at her feet—he combated all her feeble protestations, that it was impossible for her to love again—that it was far too soon to talk to her like that—that she never, never could forget her Charlie. All these whispers of resistance, he quenched by other whispers, ever more and more tender. He would be a father to her children—he would watch over their rights—he could not bear to hear her say that she had no one to love her. Did not he love her? Had not he loved her from the first day he saw her? Gradually Matilda's protests sank lower and lower—and when the new butler, who occupied Fleming's place, opened the door to bring in his mistress's afternoon cup of tea, Hepburn rose from his knees, pledged to a hundred things which the young man in his enthusiasm undertook with rapture, but which were serious enough when he came to analyse them in detail. Mrs. Charles smoothed the fair locks which were slightly ruffled upon her forehead, and laughed a little laugh of

bashful consciousness becoming her new position. "And, oh! you dreadful man," she said, when they were left alone again, "to go and make me commit myself like this before six months! I am so shocked, and so much ashamed of myself. It is all your fault, coming every day and stealing into a poor little thing's heart. Oh, John! you must promise me—you must swear to me—never to say a word to anyone for a year at least. I could not bear it. It is not my fault that I am fond of you—but you must never, never, say a word—"

"How am I to go to St. Andrews then?" said the happy Johnnie, "to look after the children's rights? What pretence can I make, if I cannot speak the truth?"

"Oh, I cannot let you go to St. Andrews," said Matilda, "I want you here, I can't get on without you; and as soon as ever you see Marjory you will forget me. Oh, yes, you may say what you like, but I know you would forget me. And to be sure you could always say you were acting as our friend," she added, looking up into his face with a merry laugh, "a gentleman may always be a lady's friend. You are my friend, recollect, in public—only my friend—until it is a year."

She laughed and Johnnie laughed, though with an odd echo somehow about, which seemed to mock him. But it was the way with women; dear, loving, tender, soulless creatures, how were they to be expected to resist a living lover for the sake of a dead husband? it was their way. It was too delightful to have this lovely thing all to himself, to stop and

make a fuss about ideals. What folly they were! What ideal in the world was equal to the soft warm touch of that hand which clung to his, and that face which brightened as he bent over it? How happy he was as he sat by her, and poured all manner of nonsense into her ear! She was happy too; flattered, amused, satisfied, and full of a fluttering pride in the thought that before six months she had again been wooed. To be sure there were prejudices which might prevent this fact being made public; but still she had the satisfaction of knowing it within herself.

CHAPTER XIX.

MARJORY was standing by Isabell's bed, putting back the infant into its place by her side when her uncle and his attendants were admitted into the cottage. She did not see the start of amazement with which Agnes and her mother recognised the strangers. She herself did not even remark their presence. Her mind was full of emotion much too warm and strong to be easily disturbed from the thoughts that occupied her, and her only feeling towards her uncle was that of impatience that he had followed her so quickly. That he should wish to examine into the whole matter personally was simple enough, and he had even insisted upon it, in his conversations with herself; consequently she was not surprised at his appearance, but only annoyed by his haste and want of consideration for the invalid. If it had been a lady he would never have broke in upon her so, Marjory said to herself. And she showed her displeasure by taking no notice of his arrival. She bent over Isabell, smoothing her pillows, and arranging the white coverlet over her.

"My uncle has come," she said, "you will not mind? He is an old man and very kind at heart. If he seems a little abrupt it is only his manner. He is our only relative, he has a right to inquire; you will not be frightened? Answer his questions as you

have answered me. He will be a good friend to—the child—and to you."

"My friends must be in a better place," said Isabell, with a faint smile.

"Yes, but we want the other too, for the child's sake," said Marjory. She was more excited than the dying girl. She began to picture to herself disagreeable questions which Mr. Charles might ask, suggestions he might make. He was kind, but he had a different code of civility for "a country lass" from that which would rule his utterances to a lady. Perhaps in general he was not wrong in this; but Isabell was not a mere country lass as he supposed. With a sense of anxiety which was stronger than seemed called for by the occasion, Marjory stood aside, and allowed her uncle to approach. Then, for the first time, she noticed the homely pair who accompanied him, and saw Agnes, flushed with excitement, standing back in a corner watching them, forcibly keeping herself silent, but with an eagerness of eye and look which meant something. The old mother, too, was gazing at them with open mouth and eyes, saying at intervals, "Lord preserve us a'!" with mingled anxiety and surprise. This curious consciousness, on the part of the spectators, disclosed to Marjory that the strange visitors were not mere neighbours, as she had thought. And she, too, gazed at them eagerly—but ignorantly—without being any the wiser. Their real identity strangely enough never occurred to her. She had associated the finding of them with Fanshawe, and with him alone. It is, perhaps, too much to say that she did

not want them to be found except by him; but certainly she had set her heart upon his accomplishment of this commission. It would be, she felt, a proof to heaven and earth that his real character was very different from his reputation—that he was a true friend—a man to trust and rely upon. She had "no object" (as she said to herself) in her wish to prove this—but yet abstractly she did wish to prove it. It was a foregone conclusion in her own mind. Therefore she had no desire that these should be the missing witnesses, and the idea did not occur to her, eager and anxious as her interest was.

"Yes, yes, May, my dear," said Mr. Charles. "I see, this is the young woman. How are you to-day? I hear you are not so well as could be wished. My niece, Miss Heriot, has told me a great deal about you. I am not wanting to be uncivil, my poor girl; but I cannot conceal from you that your story is very unlikely—very unlikely; without strong proof I cannot see how it could ever be believed."

He said this standing in the place which Marjory had given up to him, taking in everything around, the homely scene, the group which filled the room, rather than the individual whom he was addressing. When, however, he turned to her at the conclusion of his little speech, Mr. Charles gave a perceptible start. What Isabell might have been, in rude health like her sister, it would have been difficult to say, or whether the refinement and melancholy beauty of her face was purchased chiefly by grief and suffering; but certainly there was nothing in this pale and fragile creature, which answered to Mr.

Charles's idea of a country lass. He stammered a little in his confusion. He said, stumbling over his words, "I—beg your pardon; I am afraid you are —not so well—as I thought—"

"I will never be well in this world," said Isabell. "I'm going fast, fast to a better, where a'body will understand. It was Miss Heriot put that first into my head—where there will be nobody that will not understand. I'm weak, weak, no able to tell it all over again; and oh, Sir, what for should I take all that pain, no to be believed? What matter is it whether God clear my good name or no? He will do it some time—and right my little bairn. I'm tired, tired—oh, mother, I'm tired, my heart's beating; and my head's throbbing. Dinna ask me any questions. I want to rest—"

"Oh, Bell!" cried the mother, coming forward. "Oh, my Bell! tell the gentleman. Now is the time to say the truth, whatever it may be. And now I'll believe you, my bairn! I've been hard, and shut my heart. Now—now—if you'll say it again, I will believe you, Bell!"

The girl closed her eyes, and shook her head gently. "How often have I told you, and you wouldna believe me, mother? Why now, when my strength is failing, and my heart sinking?"

"Isabell!" cried Agnes, "speak to them—oh, for God's sake—look at me upon my knees to you," and she rushed forward into the midst of the room, and threw herself upon her knees, with tears bursting from her blue eyes and her hands raised in passionate supplication, "for the man's sake that's

dead, that never loved you half so well as I've done —for the bairn's sake that I'll be a mother to— Isabell! for the last time."

Wearily Isabell opened her eyes. "Am I dying then?" she said, with a feeble smile. "Eh, that would be good news! You would not put it to me so solemn if I was not dying. I'm wearied, sore wearied; but if it's the last time I must not think of mysel. My breath's going, mother, and my heart's fluttering; come and hold me by the hand, and Miss Heriot—where is Miss Heriot? Must I say it all over—every word? Sir, stand you there that I may see you. I was a foolish creature, and ignorant —knowing nothing. I didna pay attention when I should—I was fond of foolish things and dreaming."

"Bell, you were the best of my bairns; you never gave me an hour's trouble—till *that* time—"

"Whisht, mother, let me speak! Then I met with a gentleman—he was like *her* there—yon bonnie leddy, that has come to me and comforted me, and been my stay. By her ye may judge him. He said I should be his wife before God and man. Never a thought of harm, no a thought was in his mind. I'm dying and going till him. My man! no his sister there, a lady, could think less harm. Maybe I would have done what he said, good or ill; for he was like a god to me—a gentleman—no like common lads—but never a word of ill said he, mother, never a word. He said he wouldna go before the Minister, for it would be his ruin; but before decent folk."

Here the sound of a sob broke poor Isabell's interrupted monologue, a rude outbreak of emotion, sounding like a sudden discord. It came from the man who stood behind-backs, whose eyes had been gradually getting redder. The woman by him laid her hand upon him to restrain him; she had her handkerchief to her eyes; but was watching keenly through it, keeping her senses about her. Isabell was vaguely disturbed by this interruption; but after a moment's pause began again; her voice more and more broken by the struggling breath.

"They were decent folk; they would say the truth if they were found—John Macgregor and his wife—they wouldna have countenanced any sin; you may believe that, mother. Folk like them would never have countenanced what was a shame to think of. I told nobody, because he said it—no one, not even Agnes. I aye hoped, and he aye hoped. But then there came the terrible news—the awfu' news; it was in the papers. If it was not that I'm going—to him—I couldna speak of that day. Dinna ask me more. I mind nothing more, till I wakened up, and my bairn was born; and I was a disgrace and a shame!"

"No, no, Bell; no a disgrace!" cried the mother, with tears streaming from her eyes. "It was a' for the truth that I fought—the truth. I born minded nothing more."

"And ye believe me now, because I'm dying! there's no other reason. I was as true then as I am now. Oh, if these decent folk were but here, that ken a'," she cried with an effort. Another

abrupt outbreak of sudden sobbing came from the other end of the room; Isabell raised herself up—partly it was the beating of her heart that forced her into an erect position, partly a curiosity, which was stronger than her self-restraint. When she saw the strangers, she uttered a sudden cry; excitement blazed up like flame, over her delicate face, lighting wild lamps in her eyes, and bringing colour to her cheeks; a gleam as of stormy sunshine came over her. "They're here!" she cried, with an infantile laugh of pleasure, the last utterance of weakness. "Oh, make them speak! is it no true?"

"It's Gospel," cried the man, sobbing. "Oh, Bell, my bonnie woman, to see you come to this! it's a' Gospel truth. Speak out, Jean, if you're a woman, and no a stone; speak out, I tell you! It's true, Sir—as sure as death—as true as the Bible. God! woman, will ye no speak?"

"I'll speak if ye'll leave me time," said Jean. "I'm no to be pushed that gate, and pushed the other, and never left to mysel'. She was never an ill lass. I've kent her since she was this height; a bit genty creature, never just like other folk. Ye ken yourself, Sir, I said we could never swear against Bell—she's a good lass. There was some nonsense of the kind went on atween her and young Mr. Heriot—"

Isabell raised herself almost erect in her bed. Her fragile white figure shook with the heavings of her heart. But for this the flush upon her face, the overwhelming brightness of her eyes, might have banished even from the spectator most deeply in-

terested, any idea of mortal sickness. She looked at the woman with a smile.

"I'm dying!" she said, in a voice that was strangely sweet and strong. "Answer, before God —and me. Ye'll never see me mair—till the last day. Ye've my name and my bairn's in your hands. Speak out! I ask you nae favour; speak the truth—before God, and me."

"Oh, Bell!" cried the woman, terrified, raising her hand to her face; "oh, dinna look at me with those blazing e'en! Sir, we meant nae harm—John and me. We never made our house a tryst, with an ill meaning. He went on his knees to me to let him see her. We wer'na the folk to lead gentlemen astray, nor lasses neither; it was not our blame."

"Speak, ye deevil!" cried the man, furious; "or let me speak. It comes better from a woman. Who thinks of you and me? Sir, Sir! it's a' true."

The tears were running down his rough face. With his stumbling, awkward step, too big for the place, he pushed forward. "If we didna come forrit before, it was for the fear o' man," he said. "She thought it was a story that would lose me my place—like as if we was entrapping lads to marry. Oh, Bell, forgive me! it was the fear of man."

"Mother, you hear!" said Isabell. She had forgotten all the others. A glow of gentle contentment stole over her face. The strength of excitement failed her; she sank back upon the pillows, which Marjory stealing in, had raised to support

her. "Now I can depart in peace; now I'm clear; now I can go to my man. Oh, God be praised—that sent the decent folk, just in time."

"Isabell!" cried Agnes, throwing herself on the bed; "you're no so ill as that? It wasna that I thought you dying; you're no dying. I bad ye speak because they were here."

"Ay, ay! and I've spoken; and it's a' clear. The night's coming on, I canna see. Mother, you were saying—what was somebody saying? I hear a sound in my ears; it's the sea, or the wind—or maybe something more."

"Bell! what is it? oh, my Bell! It's her heart. Raise her up, to get breath; open the window. She's aye speaking, speaking. Bell, speak to your mother. My darlin' it's a' clear."

"It's voices," she said, with an effort; "voices—like in the Bible—like the sound—o' a great multitude; grander than the sea, or the wind. Do ye no hear?—and one that says 'Isabell!' among all the angels, and the saved that cry day and night, 'Honour to the Lamb!' Oh, hearken. One's stopped, and it cries 'Isabell!' Ay, my man! I'm here—I'm here!"

Then a great silence suddenly fell over the cottage, a stifled sound of feet moving, faint rustling of dresses, tinkling of the glass in which they tried to administer something to revive her, and afterwards low sobs, broken cries, but not another articulate word. The conflict of wills and voices had ended. Without a word, another brief ineffectual struggle took place round the bed—the

last struggle with death—vain, passionate, hopeless effort. Isabell did not die all at once; this hard life, which is so bitter to live, so hard to begin, is hard too to end. She could not drop it from her so easily. For hours after they moved about that bed, saying nothing to each other, hiding their faces by times, stopping their ears not to hear the painful thrill of those last breathings, which seemed to shake the cottage. The doctor had time to come all the way from St. Andrews, and look at her, pitiful and helpless, shaking his head, and whispering that she did not suffer, that consciousness was gone and pain. But it was the middle of the night before the last breath died upon poor Isabell's lips. No one of all the awe-stricken party left the cottage at first. Marjory was with the mother and sister by the bed. Mr. Charles, pale as a ghost, sat in a chair in a corner, looking on with a wondering countenance of sorrow. Had any one suggested it to him, he would have gone away; but he was absorbed like all the rest, and thought of nothing but of the wonderful act that was being accomplished before him. John Macgregor was standing on the threshold outside, his great person heaving with sobs. His wife, crying, but still with her wits about her, prepared with ghastly matter of fact composure to make herself of use. This was the scene upon which Fanshawe arrived, in the early darkening of the summer night. The baby, whom everybody had forgotten, had just awoke with a cry by the side of its insensible mother. Somehow this sudden protest of life against the pre-occupation of all the

attendants on the dying, gave a touch almost of humour to the tragic scene. Marjory lifted the infant, and it was into Fanshawe's arms that she thrust it, scarcely seeing what she did. "Take it to the woman," she said, turning away from him. Where was he to take it? He held the helpless thing in his arms, no one finding it ludicrous, or even strange, till Jean relieved him of it. And then he went and stood with John Macgregor, not knowing who he was; or what had happened, outside the door. But after all, notwithstanding his ignorance and dismay, it was Fanshawe who brought so much common sense and understanding to the scene as to send Mr. Charles home, and Macgregor, both of whom were in the way. He understood, by instinct, a great deal of what had passed, and though he did not divine who the man was, by whose side he had been standing, yet it was impossible not to perceive that some preceding agitation, in which this man had been more or less involved, had taken place in the humble room, which now the presence of death filled to overflowing. Fanshawe sent the other men away, and remained himself to see what was to be done. Strangely enough this seemed perfectly natural both to himself and Mr. Charles. He went outside, and sat down on the rocks which hedged in the bit of velvet greensward on which the cottage stood. It was a strange vigil. He watched the last rays of the evening light die out, the revealing of the stars among the clouds, the gleam of living radiance which woke in them from the edges of those masses

of vapour; and then gradually, slowly, the pale lightening over the Eastern horizon—the promise of dawn. He sat with the waves plashing up to his very feet, carried by the high tide which came in just about the time he took his place there—then ebbing slowly down among the rocks, further and further off, moving the gleaming, living line ever lower down. The pale variations of sea and sky, the gathering midnight darkness that shut out both, all the mysterious sounds of Night and Nature went on around him; and death was overshadowing behind him, and a silent awe seemed over everything. To watch a whole night so, is such an experience as few forget; and to watch outside as Fanshawe was doing—with all the ghosts of the past and shadows of the future combining to increase the impression, was more wonderful still. And yet he felt it but little, his mind and soul being closed to external impressions by a preoccupation which is more absorbing than any other on earth.

The faint grey of morning had begun to dawn when all at once he felt a soft touch upon his shoulder, and turned round, saw Marjory standing by him, like a ghost in the dimness.

"All is over;" she said, quietly; and then, "Have you watched with us all night?"

"All night," he said. "I could do nothing more. Can I do anything now?"

"Take me home," said Marjory. "I am too weary and sad to go alone. It is all over. She has got away at last. Oh, how hard it is to get rid of life!"

Her tears fell upon his hands, which held hers. He looked at her wistfully, eagerly, in the dim light, by which he could scarcely see her face. How high life was beating in his heart as he listened to these words. Hard to get rid of life! as if it were not something priceless, full of happiness, full of possibility, which a man would do anything, bear anything, rather than be rid of. He put her cloak round her while she stood passively by him, worn out, with those tears on her cheeks—and then drew her hand within his arm, and led her away silently along the dim sea-shore with all its mysterious sounds. The light increased slowly, dimly, the pale morning broke as they moved along. To Marjory it was all like a dream. To him, what was it? Every moment he could see her more plainly, and feel her, leaning on him. Rid of life! Who would be rid of that which held such prizes still?

CHAPTER XX.

No house possessed by the Hay-Heriots had ever gone through such a night as that house by the Cathedral in St. Andrews had just passed. First there had been the blank dinner hour, with no one at home to eat the food, no one but little Milly who stood at the window and cried, and imagined misfortunes unutterable which must have befallen "my May." The crying of the child infected the whole house. One of the maids had joined her at the window, another climbed to the top of the house to an attic which commanded the road "east the town," leading to the Spindle, another had stolen outside to the door in the wall, where she stood watching all comers and goers, with the wind blowing her ribbons about, and ruffling her hair. In the very midst of this suspense, Miss Jean's old coach, like a family hearse, came jolting heavily over the stones — for all the world, the excited listeners thought, like the Phantom Coach, which, as is well known, drives along the streets of St. Andrews at midnight, after a storm, carrying the drowned to the hallowed soil round the Cathedral ruins. Had it been dark, this resemblance would have been more than the nerves of the women could have borne, and the impression was scarcely lessened when Miss Jean herself, tired yet alert, with her

sharp eyes looking out from the shelter of her broad "borders" and big black bonnet, got out briskly tapping upon the pavement with her cane. Milly stayed her crying, out of very excitement, to explain her sister's absence, and was then held silent by fear while the old lady remarked upon it. "A bonny like way to leave a house with a wheen maids and one bairn!" she said. "May Hay-Heriot must be out of her senses. Out of the house at seven o'clock —the hour ye dine—did ye say it was the hour ye dine? Then it's worse than madness, it must be wickedness. Do not look at me as if ye would eat me, ye little spirit—"

"Then do not speak of May like that!" said the child passionately, smothering her sobs. "Oh! what has become of her—what has become of her? Something has happened; oh, Aunt Jean! let you and me go and seek her out. She never left us like this before. Oh my May! my May!"

"Hold your tongue you little haverel," said Miss Jean, "she is out to her dinner or something. Do you think Miss Heriot will leave her friends or her business because the table-maid is out at the door watching, or her own woman greeting at the window? Go in to your work this moment. Where is Mr. Charles? He will come in to his dinner and find nothing ready, and send ye about your business—or I would if it was me."

Then it was explained to her, by three speaking at once, that Mr. Charles too had gone out mysteriously towards the Spindle, accompanied by two strangers; and Milly, whose tears had been

stayed, began again to cry more piteously than before, and the maids to rush to the windows. Miss Jean gave some decisive taps of her cane upon the floor—"Fools!" she said, "have you not sense enough to see that they're both together with some sudden engagement they had no time to tell of? Stop this nonsense and bring ben the dinner—I'm hungry with my drive, and Milly, you're hungry with crying—"

"Oh, Aunt Jean, I could not eat a morsel. Oh, what will I do if there is anything wrong with May?"

"You're hungry with crying," said Miss Jean, "we'll wait for them no longer; bring ben the dinner. Is all the house to be turned upside down because they did not leave word where they were going? Help me off with my bonnet, woman, and dinna stand gaping. Milly, hold your tongue; is that the way to give me a welcome? You've let the child get low, you taupies, keeping her waiting. Bring ben the dinner, I tell you, we'll wait for them no longer. Shut the doors and the windows, and get the spare room ready. I've come about business, Milly, and I mean to stay all night."

By these decisive means Miss Jean brought the house into composure and subordination, and put a stop to the growing romance which the maids had begun to build up. They said in the kitchen that Miss Heriot could not be going so much to the Spindle for nothing, that it was fine to talk about a sick lass, but that more inducement was necessary to take a young leddy there in all weathers, and

that Mr. Chairles had found it out. This invention Miss Jean so far nipped in the bud, that she gave them all work to do, which occupied them fully and diverted their thoughts from this delightful fiction. The old lady had the spare room prepared for herself, and a fire lighted, a luxury never much out of place in St. Andrews, though it was but August, and the flush of Summer still ought to have been over the world. It was a gloomy night, dark clouds and darker sea, everything that was dismal and discouraging out of doors, and not much that was cheery within. Miss Jean herself, with many thoughts in her mind, established herself in the drawing-room after dinner—having sent Milly, much against her will, to bed—to wait for some news of her relations who had thus left the house empty to receive her. She sat in the unfamiliar room, looking out upon the old pinnacles of the cathedral ruins which were associated with many an early passage of her youth—and going back into her life, lived in it as old people do, feeling it present with her, notwithstanding the lively threads of present interest which crossed each other like a network over that landscape peculiarly her own which lay behind. Her quick mind darted in a moment from recollections of an evening fifty years ago, when she had wandered, not uncompanioned, through these ruins, to many a speculation as to how her grand-niece, Marjory, her representative, might be occupying herself, and what manner of interference "auld Charlie" might be making in some possible complication of affairs.

For her nephew was "auld Charlie" to Miss Jean as well as to the youngest scoffer who called him by that name. The old maiden was contemptuous of the old bachelor. His age was an object of greater scorn to her than it was to the young men who on the whole liked "auld Charlie." "A poor creature, a poor feeble old creature, with no character to speak of," she said of him. She scorned him for being what he was, nobody's husband, nobody's father, and amid the openings of her old dream, while still she seemed to herself to be straying down the vast nave traced out by its old pillars, with her hand upon some one's arm, who was dead and gone years ago—there recurred to her, now and then, a sarcastic criticism upon the old man who was so much younger than herself. She herself was two persons in one, difficult to identify in their separate characters: young Jean Hay-Heriot among the ruins, fresh and sweet as the youngest rose in the garden: old Miss Jean with her shrivelled face surrounded by her "borders," her wrinkled hand leaning on her cane. But as for Mr. Charles he had never been but one, the same figure throughout, always lean, long, dried up, occupied about nick-nacks, buried in old books, unbending to nothing but golf. "And now he's meddling with Marjory," Miss Jean said to herself with a vindictive gleam of her black eye, "him that knows no more about it than a man of wood! But I'll see to that, I'll see to that;" and then the sweep of the great west window caught her eye, and she was young Jean again, looking up at it to hide her confused

sweet girlish face from some one who would gaze too closely. Which was the real one between these two? which the most true, the past that lives for ever, or the present that is but for a moment? The old woman sat absorbed in this bewilderment of mingled memory and observation, and did not think the dim hours long as they stole past her. She would not have the lamp brought in till late. She sat at the window as Marjory had done, her old head framed in by the delicate crown of the broken arch, perfect on one side, an exquisite flowing shaft of ancient stone, with canopy work fit for a queen of heaven—on the other nothing but gloomy sky and sea. The darkness closed over her but Miss Jean noted it not. The scene before her eyes had brought all her life back to her; in that very room she had danced a girl. What need had she of lights, of books, something to divert her? as the sympathetic maid suggested who found the old lady in the dark and was sorry for her.

"Go away, and bring me the lamp in an hour. I like the gloaming," said Miss Jean in a softened tone.

"Gloaming! it was mirk as midnicht, and her an old witch, sitting in the dark," said the woman, reporting the circumstance below; and this further aggravation of a weird old woman seated by herself unseen at the window, seeing nobody could tell how far or how keenly, carried a still further element of mystery into the vague wonder and suspense of the house.

The arrival of Mr. Charles, which took place

late, about ten o'clock, when it was quite dark, was the first thing that roused the old lady. He came in very unsteady on his long legs, with a somewhat dazed and pre-occupied look—too much absorbed by all the events of the evening to be much startled by anything that might happen, even by a visitor so unexpected. He came in and made some sort of greeting, taking her presence for granted in a way which bewildered her, and then threw himself upon a chair in the dim room. "She's dying," he said in that dull tone of spent excitement which expresses so much.

"Who's dying?" cried Miss Jean in alarm, starting from her seat at the window. "Not our May?"

"May?" Mr. Charles said with a kind of dull wonder. "May? She's yonder," pointing his thumb over his shoulder, "as she was at Tom's side, poor fellow! God be praised, no—it's not her; but that poor thing—"

"The—gamekeeper's daughter;—the—lass—? but that's too good news."

Mr. Charles looked at her with reproof in his eyes. "You know nothing about it. She is far from a common kind of lass; but that is a thing women never can understand," he added, taking a certain vigour from his opposition. "How those that are on the other side, should have any title to respect—that is a thing you can never understand."

"Maybe not," said Miss Jean with lively and instant assumption of the quarrel. "We're no so clever as you. You can aye discriminate; ye see at

a glance, and tell the good from the evil. We're weaker vessels; but, perhaps, if ye were to tell me some of the arguments that convinced your strong mind—"

Mr. Charles jumped up, galled at this speech and the tone in which it was uttered; but his weariness overcame him, and he sat down again, somewhat humbled. "No argument—no argument," he said, "the sight of her—that is all. I've left Marjory there. She'll not leave the bedside so long as life remains. I thought she might have come away now, for the poor thing is no longer conscious; but May feels it her duty to Tom."

"And you left her—a lady—a young woman—to come home alone."

"Ay," said Mr. Charles, and then paused, "I am meaning, not quite alone. There is that lad Fanshawe," he added in a deprecating tone.

"Fanshawe! him that was at Pitcomlie before—the English lad?"

"Yes, the English lad—I never thought of it till this moment; but he has a way of turning up when he's wanted that is very extraordinary—very extraordinary! To see him appear, like a ghost, at that cottage door—and not one of us surprised within. To be sure," Mr. Charles added with sudden gravity, "all our thoughts were turned another way."

"But my thoughts are not turned any other way," said Miss Jean. "I don't know what folly you're thinking of, her and you; but Marjory is my first thought. All this about your cottage doors,

and your thoughts turned other ways, is not intelligible to me. I would like to know what you mean, Charlie. Who is this lad, and what has he to do with Marjory? You've left him to bring her home —in the middle of the night."

"No—no," said Mr. Charles, deprecating, "not so bad as that—not the middle of the night. And how could I help it? It was no place for me—a man that could be of little use. I came away by his advice. It's a long walk, and I've eaten nothing. And, perhaps," he said, pausing with his hand on the bell, "I should bid them get a room ready for Fanshawe—he must stop somewhere. So far as I know, the beds at The Royal may all be taken. I suppose I must give him a bed in this house."

"You know best who to take in, and who to leave out," said Miss Jean. "I never interfere with the arrangements of the house. Perhaps you would like me to go to The Royal? For otherwise, I have my boxes in the spare room."

"Certainly, certainly," said Mr. Charles, waving his hand; and he gave his orders with a degree of explanatoriness to which Miss Jean listened with grim impatience. "There's a gentleman, Mr. Fanshawe, that may be coming in late — with Miss Heriot; not that he's with Miss Heriot now, or more than just in the neighbourhood. But she may be kept late, and at my request he will bring her home —you understand?"

"Oh ay, Sir, I understand!" said the maid cheerfully; "the English gentleman; he was here the day already, waiting long, and very anxious about Miss

Heriot. He went off after you to the Spindle, when he heard ye had gone that gait; he was just off a journey; but he would take no refreshment, no so much as a glass of wine;" but aye, "where was Miss Heriot? where was Miss Heriot? that was all that was in his head."

"It was me he wanted, in reality," said Mr. Charles, looking anxiously towards Miss Jean; "on business. We have a great many business transactions, him and me; and put some cold meat or something in the dining-room. If Mr. Fanshawe is kept very late—as he may be, waiting at my request for Miss Heriot (for he is a young man, Aunt Jean, and I am an old one—he was more able to wait than me); he will have to sleep here."

"And will Miss Heriot be late, Sir?" said the maid.

"She's waiting upon a poor young woman that's dying," said Mr. Charles, with solemnity. "You're amused, Aunt Jean? I'm sorry that I cannot join you, after the scene I've been going through — nor see the cause."

"Oh, you blind auld beetle!" said Miss Jean; "putting it into the lass's head every word you said, to mix up May's name with this lad's! Who is the lad? — is he worthy of her? or does he want her? or have you paid any attention, ye doited auld body, to what I took the trouble to say?"

"I have taken your advice," said Mr. Charles shortly; "much to my own discomfort; but nothing has ever come of it, that I can see."

"That's no answer to my question," cried the

old lady peremptorily. "Is he worthy of her? and who is the lad?"

"So far as I can make out," said Mr. Charles; "he is very little to brag of; a good-natured ne'er-do-weel—nobody's enemy but his own."

"And that's just the bitterest foe of everybody that belongs to him," said Miss Jean; "and it's a man like that that you leave to bring May home; to wait for her, and feel for her, and bring her along a lonely road, and take advantage of all his opportunities—"

"The young man is a gentleman," said Mr. Charles eagerly, with an indignant flush on his face.

"And you're a fool, Charlie Heriot!" cried the old lady, growing red—as a woman of seventy-five could scarcely be expected to do. She was angry and ashamed at his interpretation of her words; she got up hastily to retire to her room, every fold of her shawl quivering with indignation. "Judging by what you say, it is little use sitting up for her, I suppose," she said. "To think of a young woman like Marjory left to come home with a strange man in the middle of the night! You're a bonnie guardian, Chairlie Heriot; you give us all great encouragement to trust the young women of the family to you."

To tell the truth, something of the same feeling crept into Mr. Charles' own mind, mingled with shame, as he went down to the dining-room to eat his long postponed dinner, and refresh himself with a little bodily comfort. He began to feel much

discontented, and ashamed. To leave Fanshawe to take care of her had seemed very natural in the midst of the excitement at the cottage, as soon as he had recognised that his own presence there was uncalled for. But in the light of Miss Jean's comments it had a very different appearance. He had put Marjory into Fanshawe's hands; he had accepted him as in some sort her natural protector and companion. This thought entirely drove from his mind the real event of the night; the occurrence which had absorbed him so short a time before. Now that he was out of the shadow of the death-chamber, all that belonged to it flitted away from him. The same feeling was strong in both of the old people; they pushed death aside almost rudely, as a thing which once completed, should be thought as little of as possible—and plunged into the concerns of life again with eagerness. The scene had been solemn, the moment touching; but these were over, and life and its necessities were not over. Mr. Charles put himself upon three chairs in the dining-room, after he had eaten his late refection, and declared his intention of waiting there till Miss Heriot returned. He fell asleep very uncomfortably, waking up now and then with a crick in his neck, with pins and needles in his feet or his fingers, with an indescribable sense of discomfort penetrating even into his sleep. When he woke from a painful doze on his three chairs, he decided with himself that now he might venture to go to bed—that she would not now come till the morning, when no one could make any remark. Accordingly, when

Marjory, half dead with fatigue and emotion, reached the house, there was no one up to receive her. She had scarcely uttered a single word the whole way, and sometimes Fanshawe, holding her fast with her hand pulled through his arm, had half fancied she must have fainted or fallen into some stupefying trance, though the mechanical motion continued and she kept walking on, like one galvanized. When at last a sleepy maid was roused to admit them, the early morning sunshine was lying warm upon the silent streets and houses. As she entered, and he after her, on the strenuous invitation of the maid, who was partly hospitable and partly afraid lest anyone, "from our house" should be seen making his way to The Royal "at such an hour"—the stillness of the house came over them both with a strange half-alarming sensation. At the top of the stairs in the bright solemn early daylight Miss Jean stood, in her broad-bordered nightcap, and with curious flannel draperies wrapped about her, looking down upon them as they mounted the stairs. Marjory was too weary to feel much surprise.

"Is it you, Aunt Jean?" she asked languidly.

"Is this the way you treat your visitors, coming in at this hour of the morning?" said Miss Jean, "and with so little regard to what folk may think? Let the young man bide below till I'm out of the way. I'll see you to your room, Marjory. You want some woman-person to see after you, and that taupie of a maid is snoring, disturbing my slumbers for hours past."

"I am sorry you waited for me," Marjory said in her strange stupor, "but when you know the cause—"

"Oh, ay, I know the cause," said Miss Jean, throwing a jealous glance over her shoulder at Fanshawe, who hesitated and lingered on the stairs. "I know the cause," she repeated, following Marjory into her room and closing the door with much severity, "but for my part I'm a great deal more interested, to tell the truth, in what may be the result."

Thus with one consent the elder members of the party—the ones who had lived longest and were nearest the ending — thrust the death-scene away from them, and went on with the threads of life as if there had been no interruption of its ordinary course. This was what they cared for — the living, not the dead.

And Fanshawe, dazed too with his watching, with his strange long walk through the unnatural yet fresh and lovely morning, which had seemed to spy upon them all the way, with wondering looks, like a child, went into the room prepared for him —having added that picture of Miss Jean in her dressing-gown to all the others, of which his mind was full. He did not hear what she said, but he made out her sharp look of disapproval, and the jealousy of her watch over Marjory, thus peremptorily parted from him, and taken out of his keeping the moment she crossed the threshold. She had been so absolutely confided to him before, that the contrast was all the more remarkable. When

he was safe in his room, the ludicrousness of the old lady's appearance came before him so strongly, that he laughed in spite of himself—and then was intensely ashamed of himself, and crept to bed, feeling guilty in the daylight, feeling as if he had been doing something he ought not to have done. How strange to glide into the stillness of an orderly sleeping-room after an exciting night! And he was dizzy with his journey, with fatigue, and long waking. But still, of all the memories of the night, Miss Jean at the top of the stairs was the one that lingered most in his memory. He dreamed of her, and laughed in his sleep, and woke with a half-hysterical mixture of laughter and emotion, as much moved by that momentary comic glimpse as by all that had happened. But this levity, fortunately, nobody knew.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE party which met in the morning after this vigil regarded each other strangely, feeling the fever of their excitement still about them. Marjory did not appear, and it was from Mr. Charles that Fanshawe learnt that his own mission had failed, and that the missing witness had already appeared, a fact which he had guessed from all he saw, but had not been informed of. There was a long discussion over the breakfast table about this strange change in the family affairs, and all the revolutions it must bring about.

"An application must be made at once to the Court of Session to appoint tutors," Mr. Charles said, who was full of suppressed excitement, "and these young women at Pitcomlie must be informed. It will be hard upon them, poor things, after all."

"They had nothing to do with the house or the family," said Miss Jean, briskly. "Strangers, all strangers; neither one nor another has any pity from me. Eight thousand pounds is not a bad provision for a younger son's widow, with nothing of her own; but take you my advice, Charlie Heriot, and be very clear in your mind about this bairn. I'm not fond of chance bairns coming in when nobody expects them. This lass, that you all think so much of, may have been everything that's good;

but I would have the court to sit upon it, and make sure. I would trust nothing to chance, if it was me."

"We'll take every precaution—every precaution," said Mr. Charles; and then he fell into a reverie, from which he roused up slowly, with a look of satisfaction in his face, rubbing his hands. "I am glad," he said, "that I never began to dismantle my old room. I've thought of doing it more than once. If I could suppose," added Mr. Charles, changing countenance, "that leaving Pitcomlie would be any heart-break to these young women; if they had had time to get attached to the place— But as one house or another is the same to them, and Mrs. Charles is not badly provided for, on the whole, with her pension and all— I hope it's not any way hard-hearted on my part."

"But you're old, Charlie Heriot," said Miss Jean, "old to be tutor to a little bairn. Granting that you may live as long as I have done, for instance, that's about fifteen years—and nobody can calculate on more—that would leave the boy just at the worst age. You're spare and thin, and I would not wonder if ye were one of the long-lived ones of the family; but granting even that you were spared to be as old as me—"

"You'll live twenty years yet, Aunt Jean," said Mr. Charles, who did not like the turn the conversation was taking.

"That may be, or may not be," said Miss Jean. "I'm very indifferent; a year sooner or a year later matters very little. To be sure when you're well

over your threescore and ten, there's no saying—but it's never to be calculated on. If this bairn is young Tom's lawful son, as you say, and but three months old, poor bit thing, he must have young guardians. The like of Mr. Fanshawe here now; or as women are coming into fashion, Marjory—"

Mr. Charles gave an alarmed look at the audacious proposer of such a conjunction. He was fairly frightened by it. He looked up with a certain consternation, to meet the bold response of Miss Jean's black eyes, twinkling with satisfaction at the thought of having thus bewildered him.

"Ye need not look at me in that alarmed manner, Charlie Heriot," she said. "There's nothing but what is strictly reasonable in what I say."

"If I were thought worthy of such a charge," said Fanshawe, startled too. "I should, of course, do my very best to acquit myself of the trust; but I have, at present, no connection with Fife—I have no claim to such a distinction; there must be many others much better qualified—"

"It's not a thing we can discuss," said Mr. Charles, hurriedly; "it is not in our hands; there are a great many preliminaries. And in the first place there is one that's not pleasant. These young women, how are they to be told? They must be told. What would you say, Aunt Jean, would be the best thing to do? Perhaps as you are going that way, if you were to see them and break it in a quiet way? a lady is always the best to do that; there's more delicacy, and more sympathy, and

understanding, and so forth. Some clergymen have a gift that way; but a lady is always the best."

"I am much obliged to you, Charlie Heriot," said Miss Jean, "but in my opinion you're the only bearer of the news that's possible. Nobody can do it but you."

"Do you really think so?" said Mr. Charles. "Now I cannot help thinking a stranger would be better—or perhaps a letter—that might be the best of all—a letter now. Unless Mr. Fanshawe here, that could bring no painful recollections to their minds, a young man quite unconnected with everything—and pleasant manners, and all that—would be so obliging as to drive out, and just prepare them a little. My niece Marjory has so much confidence in Mr. Fanshawe. It is not a long drive, and the country is looking its very best. Would it be too much to ask, as a friend of the family?" Mr. Charles said, with an insinuating look.

Miss Jean's chuckle, and the look she gave him out of her sharp black eyes, overcame Fanshawe's gravity more than the proposal thus anxiously made. Even Mr. Charles saw the fun, and relieved himself and his anxiety with a long low laugh, under protest as it were—for laughing was far from appropriate at this juncture of the family affairs. But the most amusing thing of all was that, though they laughed at the idea of entrusting Fanshawe with this mission, after much talk and many suggestions, and a great deal of comic remark, it was after all he who went. He consented—because it was his fate, because it was propitiating Marjory's friends,

because it was a proof to her of his readiness to serve all connected with her; but chiefly, it must be allowed, because it was his fate. This was what he was born into the world for; to do what people asked him, to serve others, to be good for much so far as other people were concerned, but good for little to himself. Miss Jean looked on with a certain grim amusement while it was all being settled. She gave her opinion on the subject with her usual frankness.

"I would not have gone had I been you," she said. "I would have let old Charlie do his nasty errands for himself."

Fanshawe laughed with some conscious shame, feeling indeed that he had been somewhat weak; and the old lady resumed—

"Nobody thinks the more of you for being too kind. A willing horse is aye over-ridden; but that's not all. In this world folk take you at your own word, Mr. Fanshawe. They think little of a man that holds himself cheap. It's no advantage — either with man or woman. The best thing ye can do is to let folk see that a favour from you is a real favour, not easy to get, not given to everybody—"

"Miss Jean, you speak like Solomon himself," said Fanshawe, with mock reverence and real confusion, "or rather like the Queen of Sheba,—which is the next wisest, I suppose."

"Maybe I am like the Queen of Sheba," said Miss Jean; "but it's men far from Solomon that I've come to see. You like Fife, I suppose, Mr. Fanshawe, that I find you back here?"

"I suppose so too," he said, with a rueful comic sense that he was by no means a free agent, "since you find me here, Miss Jean—as you say—"

"You should not repeat another person's words, it's not civil. And yet Fife has but small attractions for a young man. You're fond of golf, I suppose, like all the rest?"

"Probably I might be," he said, laughing, "if I had the chance; but I have never tried yet—"

"Oh, then you're one of those archæ-somethings, that make the old stones speak?" said Miss Jean. "Oh, but the like of me could make them speak better, if we were to tell all we mind and all we have seen."

"I am not an archæ-anything," said Fanshawe.

"Then it's very strange to me—very strange," said the old lady, looking him in the face, "what pleasure you can find in staying here?"

He laughed—this time an uneasy laugh, and felt himself redden uncomfortably. Why, indeed, should he stay here? To go on Mr. Charles's errands, to have all sorts of disagreeable offices thrust upon him, to be sent off, perhaps, at a moment's notice, to be made use of on all hands. This was what his past experience had been, and why should it be different in the future? The old woman's two black eyes, set deep in their shrivelled sockets, looked knowingly, not unkindly at him, with a gleam of amusement, but also with a certain sympathy. "There does not seem much reason, does there, why I should stay?" he said, and got

up and went to the window to look out, avoiding her keen eyes.

"Young man," said Miss Jean, "I don't know much about you, and what I know is not the best that might be; but you're not an ill young man as men go. On the whole, I'm inclined to be on your side. And take you my advice. Don't make too little of yourself; don't be at everybody's call; stand up for yourself, if you would have other folk stand up for you. So far as I've seen, your fault is that you're better than most folk. Don't be that, that's the worst of all mistakes."

"You mean that I am a yielding fool, and cannot say 'No,'" said Fanshawe; "but that, after all is scarcely the case. There are circumstances, perhaps, if I could tell them to you, that justify me—"

"No circumstances, but a man's nature account for that kind of conduct," said Miss Jean, briskly; "but if it's any comfort to you, I'm inclined to be on your side."

Whatever comfort there might be in this, Fanshawe had it to console him on his drive. He set out without seeing Marjory. When he found himself driving not too quickly over those long country roads, on the business which was not his, and realised the disagreeable mission he had undertaken, he felt more weak and foolish than even Miss Jean had represented him to himself. For what was all this? To commend himself to Marjory? or because it was his nature and his fate? He was thoroughly discontented with himself. Was he, who

was thus driven hither and thither by the will of others, who seemed to have no business of his own in the world, but always and only the business of others—was he the kind of man to step boldly out of his groove, to begin an independent life, to ask any woman to share that existence? Nobody but those who are over-persuadable, ready to be overborne by the appeals made to them by their more indolent neighbours, and to take upon their shoulders burdens which are none of theirs, can understand how ashamed Fanshawe felt of his own amiability in the business which he had at present in hand—or how disgusted with the piece of work which Mr. Charles had basely thrust upon his shoulders. As he approached Pitcomlie, he realized more and more clearly how disagreeable it was. The sight of the house which had filled so important a chapter in his life made his heart beat. There it was that he had been roused out of the equanimity of his placid, easy-going existence; and what good had that awakening done? None but to make him a dissatisfied instead of a very contented, happy sort of fellow; to show him the evil without opening the way to any remedy; to fill him with longings after the unattainable without conferring upon him the strength necessary to struggle and attain it. Marjory! the whole place was full of her; the cliff, with its velvet coverlet of green sward, round which so often by her side he had taken his "turn;" the sundial by which he seemed to see her seated; the roofless old house, against the grey walls of which he had watched her figure so often, and which

formed so fit a background for her; everything was full of Marjory. The presence of her image there made it somehow more easy for him to do what he was going to do. He marched into the well-known drawing-room, almost regardless of the servant who rushed after, pulling on his coat, to announce him. He saw with a certain sharp sense of sarcastic pleasure somebody rise hastily from Mrs. Charles's side, and retire into a distant corner. Somebody—that sentimental personage called Johnnie, whose presence had once made him furiously jealous. He was ready to laugh now at the sight of this young man, whom he recognised at once with that attraction of jealousy and dislike which is as strong as love. Why was he so pleased to see Johnnie Hepburn start disconcerted from Mrs. Charles's side? It pleased him to think of telling it to Marjory; the power of discrediting her old admirer in her eyes was quite grateful to him; he was spitefully delighted—there is no other word that can describe his feelings. If Fanshawe had but thought of it, he might have felt himself quite delivered from the danger of being too amiable by this vigorous outburst of dislike and feelings quite un-evangelical. But somehow it did not occur to him to judge his own sentiments in that uncompromising way.

He had a hostile reception; from the moment of his appearance the ladies at Pitcomlie made sure that he was coming on no friendly errand. Verna came in from the cliff through the open window, having caught a glimpse of him; she was very pale, with a scared look which Fanshawe could

not understand. They both looked at him with a stare of something like defiance, but took no other notice of his presence. This was very embarrassing at first. He faltered a little as he drew near, being very pervious to incivility, and all the smaller pricks by which the mind can be assailed.

"I have come to execute a commission from Mr. Charles Hay-Heriot," he said, looking round him almost pitifully for support. Johnnie Hepburn afforded none. He even turned his back and gazed out of one of the windows. He did not stand by a brother in distress. He was too much frightened for the women, if truth must be told.

"Oh, yes; to be sure; and I think we could guess what it was," said Matilda. "Pray speak out. Don't be afraid. You need not have too much consideration, or that sort of thing, for me."

"Indeed, I was told to have every consideration," said Fanshawe, perplexed. "Mr. Charles——"

"Oh, why keep up the farce of Mr. Charles?" cried Matilda. "Say Marjory at once. We know it is all her hatching, this conspiracy; and oh! you may be quite sure whatever can be done, by law, against conspiracy—"

"Hold your tongue, Matty," said Verna, in a sharp whisper. "You fool! don't be always showing your hand."

"As if I cared!" cried Matilda; "as if I did not see Marjory's hand! Besides, it is well known that she keeps him to run errands for her, and do what-

ever she tells him. Oh! say it out! We are prepared for everything you have to say."

"Then my errand may be all the shorter," said Fanshawe. "It is only to tell you, from Mr. Hay-Heriot, that a discovery has been made about your brother-in-law, Tom Heriot. It has been found out that he was married, and has left a son—"

Here he was interrupted by a defiant peal of laughter, and looking up, surprised, saw both ladies laughing almost violently, as at the most excellent joke.

"Oh! this is too good," the one said to the other; "too good; just what we expected. But Marjory might have invented something better," said Matilda. "I could have made up a better story myself."

Fanshawe stood, struck dumb, as a man of his breeding and character could not fail to be by such a rude and foolish reception of his message. He did not know how to reply. They spoke, as it were, another language, of which he had no comprehension.

"I had better withdraw, I think," he said. "I don't know what I can add, or reply; there is nothing, so far as I know, that I can say more."

"Oh, I don't doubt Marjory entrusted you with a great deal more to say!" cried Mrs. Charles. "She wanted to humble us; but you may tell her she sha'n't humble us. We are people who can defend ourselves. If she isn't clever enough even to make up a better story than this—"

"I think," said Fanshawe, "it would be well to leave Miss Heriot out of the discussion; she has nothing to do with it—and, as it is evident, that you do not in the least understand her—"

"What do you mean, Sir, by saying Mrs. Charles does not understand?" said Hepburn, coming from his window. A burning flush covered the young man's face; his eyes looked hot and bloodshot, and the veins were knotted upon his forehead; he was suffering such agonies of shame and pain as few people, perhaps, have gone through; shame for the woman whom he loved. Yes, though he was ashamed of her, though he perceived her meanness, her prettiness, her folly, still he loved her. He had stood aloof as long as he could; now, when the tugging at his heart, as well as her impatient looks, called him to her side—when very shame impelled him to come to her defence, to save her from her own folly, to hide from himself the gnawing pangs of his own shame—that shame took the fiercer form of passion. If he had worn a sword he would have drawn it; if there had been any other foolish way of rushing into mortal conflict he would have adopted it. It was the writhing of his own pain which excited him, but he tried to make it look like indignation. "If you have anything to say to Mrs. Charles, Sir," he added fiercely, "or any objections to make, be so good as to address yourself to me."

"To you! why should I?" cried Fanshawe, more amazed than ever.

"Because she has given me the privilege of

standing between her and all impertinent intruders," cried the unhappy young man, taking her hand in an agony of self-humiliation. Poor boy! he identified himself with her publicly at the moment when he saw most distinctly and suffered most sharply from the revelation of her character, which, to do her justice, she had never meant to withhold from him. He almost hated her in the vehemence of his love; hated her for not being what he would have had her, with a hatred which somehow intensified his passion. The sight was so strange and painful that it subdued the impulse of anger in Fanshawe's mind.

"In that case," he said gravely, "since I can neither fight with you, nor argue with you, I will withdraw, Mr. Hepburn; and Mr. Heriot's communication can be made officially—if necessary, to you. Good morning, I have no more to say."

Verna rushed forward as he opened the door. Already her better sense had perceived the folly of her sister's words.

"Mr. Fanshawe, Matilda is always ridiculous!" she cried, breathless; "but we will not yield a step till we are forced—not a step!"

"So be it!" said Fanshawe; "though I hope your advisers will counsel you less foolishly. At all events, I have said what I had to say."

"Forget Matilda's nonsense, at least!" cried the sister. Matilda had thrown herself back upon her sofa, where the unfortunate Johnnie was kneeling by her, soothing her. "But I will not give up, I cannot

give up!" she said passionately, under her breath, clasping her hands. She was not aware she had said it; her face, which was very pale, took a strange character of force and high purpose,—yes, of high purpose, such as it was. She did not wish to defraud anyone; but she was struggling for bare life; she followed Fanshawe out, going with him to the door, with rising uneasiness—the more generous part of her character waking with her better judgment. "All that about Miss Heriot," she said, gasping, "was ridiculous; and Mr. Fanshawe, I am sure she did not mean to be rude to you; I never meant to be rude to you; it was only temper and surprise. And oh, when a blow like this is coming, it seems so much easier when you can feel it is somebody's fault!"

"But you are much too sensible to believe so?" said Fanshawe, "who could—or would—attempt to deceive you in such a matter? Do you think an invention of this kind could ever stand the eye of day?"

"It is—it must be an invention!" cried Verna; and then, poor soul, she had recourse to that expedient which women employ by instinct, and which, did they but know it, always ruins their cause, though it may gain them a momentary triumph. She appealed to her companion, as if that could serve her. "Oh, Mr. Fanshawe," she said, "we should do well if we were but left alone. The place would soon be got into order. I have given up all my plans about the house. I should see that Tommy was brought up as he ought to be. Why cannot they let us alone?"

"Do you think it possible," he said, with some impatience, "that people like the Heriots are framing a lie in order to harm you?"

She looked at him with dilating eyes, in which the tears gradually rose. She had no understanding of the question. It came natural to her to think that somebody must have done it. "I would try to do what they wished," she faltered, looking at him with a pathetic desire to understand. "I should be very glad to take their advice—I would do anything—"

"Miss Bassett," said Fanshawe; "supposing it could affect the question in any way—which it could not—but supposing, for the sake of argument, that these good resolutions of yours could affect the question; how long will you be able to do anything if this piece of news Mr. Hepburn has told me is true?"

"What piece of news?" She looked so scared that he was almost frightened by the impression his words had produced. "Oh, you think there is something between—? But that is unjust to poor Matilda. She could not think of such a thing so soon. She is only amusing herself. You are very cruel to my sister," cried Verna, turning her back upon him without another word. He went out with a smile, and jumped into his dog-cart, glad to get clear of the whole business. It was nothing to him; but she, poor soul, fled to her own room—so passionately excited that she could scarcely keep still as she rushed up those warm, noiseless, carpeted stairs which had seemed to her like the very path to

Elysium, a little while before. There, at least, howsoever things might turn out, her power and reign were over. She could have torn her hair or her dress, or anything that came within her reach, in her passion. It was all over. A mean and small life of dependence and servility was all that now remained to her. To be turned out one way or another, what did it matter? Nay, it would be better to be turned out with Matilda than by her; better to share her downfall than to be crushed by her triumphant prosperity. Thus of the three people affected by Fanshawe's message, there was but one person whom it affected mildly, and that the one most concerned. Matilda, after her fit of abuse of Marjory and the old family, shed a few angry tears, and then was comfortable again, and ready for such dalliance with her lover, interspersed by quarrels, as was her only fashion of mental amusement. But it would be hard to describe the mingled passions in Hepburn's mind, as he knelt by the sofa, scorning, hating, adoring, the pretty, miserable, beautiful creature who had bewitched him. It was not her fault; all women were so; did not every sage bear testimony to it, from Solomon downwards? And the poor young fellow, in the revulsion of his feelings, took to admiring her more and more, dwelling upon her beauty, her movements, her glances, all the outward part of her. These were what women possessed to make men mad and happy—nothing more.

And Verna up-stairs sobbed in an hysterical passion. She had lost her very life.

CHAPTER XXII.

It is needless to trace all the steps by which the real heir of the Heriots was placed in such possession of his rights as a poor little orphan baby of three months' old could attain. Before his young mother was carried to the family grave, where she was laid, under silent protest from her humble family, who stood aloof with a pride familiar to the Scotch peasant, giving up the child with a certain grim and indignant reluctance—the infant was taken to St. Andrews, and placed under Marjory's care. This was done by Agnes, who all along had regarded Tom Heriot's sister as her rival and enemy. She carried the child herself, scorning all aid, to Mr. Charles Heriot's house. If possible, her peasant appearance—the air of a respectable maidservant, which was natural to her—was more manifest than ever. She would not allow it to be supposed that she wished to approach herself, by ever so little, to the "gentles," with whom her sister had been connected.

"I've brought you the bairn," she said, confronting Marjory, with that defiant look which had never quite left her face; and she unfolded the sleeping baby from the shawl in which he was muffled, and laid him down upon the sofa, sternly repressing all sign of emotion. "He was to be mine," she said,

briefly, "I promised to be a mother to him, but it's reasonable now that he should be in your hands. My sister, up to her last day," and here a spasm crossed the resolute features, "never knew that he was the heir—nor my mother. They thought the bairn would be provided for, that was a'. I knew well enough—but why should I have troubled her innocent mind, that heeded no such vanities? And I allow that a bairn like this, born the heir, should be in the hands of the family. You and me will, maybe, never meet again—"

"Agnes," said Marjory, "you cannot think that I would wish to separate you like this from Isabell's child?"

Again Agnes's comely face was swept as by a wind of emotion, and again she banished all trace of feeling. "I know you are kind," she said. "It is your nature; but I'm of the nature that I canna bide kindness. I'll take it from my equals—but no from you—and nothing else can be between us—though I respect ye—I respect ye," she added, hurriedly. "I've no a word to say. If I had been to choose, I would have chosen different. I would rather he had been a poor lad's son, with little siller. I would have bred him up, and watched him night and day, and put my hope and my heart on him; but oh, being otherwise, it's a blessing of Providence that it's come to light now, and no later. Time makes no marks upon a helpless infant, as it would do upon a grown lad. It's best to part with him now."

Here two tears, big and bitter, fell upon the

child's white frock, making two large spots, which Agnes, taking out her handkerchief, did her best to wipe away.

"He shall know all that you did for his mother —all that you would have done for him," said Marjory. "He will grow up to reward you, at least, with his love."

"Reward me!" said Agnes, with a hot flush on her cheeks.

"I said, with his love," said Marjory, gently, "which is what no one would scorn, not the Queen."

"No, no the Queen. She's a good leddy," said Agnes; "but ye can take many a thing from them below you that you canna take from them above you. Love's no love unless you're a kind of equals. I would rather he kent nothing about us. We're no of his condition, and never can be. Eh, my poor Bell! my poor Bell! that was so pleased he should be a gentleman's son, without thinking that it parted him from all belonging to her," cried Agnes, the tears rushing down her face in a sudden tempest. Then she dried her eyes hurriedly. "Miss Heriot, I ken he's in good hands. We'll never trouble you, and you'll no breed him up to despise us. I must away now; there's aye plenty to do, God be praised."

"But, Agnes, I shall see you again? You will not go away without coming to see the child and me?"

"It would serve no purpose," she said. "I'll see you where I once saw you before, in the churchyard. "Oh, little did I think how I was to go there

next! I grudge her to you, I grudge her to you! though I do not deny it's an honour, a' the honour that can be shown now—"

"All that we have ever had it in our power to show," said Marjory.

"I'm saying nothing against that," said Agnes, with her unquenchable look of rivalry, of unsuccessful rivalry, compelled to yield to superior power. She bent over the child, who slept peacefully on the sofa, for a moment, and then she turned and left the room with scant ceremony. Her heart was too sore for politeness, and politeness is not the cardinal virtue of her kind. Thus she passed away out of Marjory's life. The strange interlude of her connection with the Heriots must have looked like a dream to her in after-days. She never interfered, never claimed to see the child, never asserted any right to him. Partly with that stoicism which belongs to her class and nation, and partly for very love's sake, she gave him up, making the sacrifice absolute and perfect, as only a powerful nature can do. How could she? many a feeble critic said afterwards. The peasant-girl could, because of love, and because she was tenderer and stronger than most; the effort rent her heart, but she did it, feeling the fitness of the sacrifice.

And the baby who had been born amid the peat-smoke in a Highland cottage, who had been frantically concealed at first, a shame to everybody belonging to him, entered upon another kind of existence without knowing it, in equal ignorance of his cloudy entry into life, and of this sudden revolu-

tion. He lay on the soft sofa, softly sleeping, placid as if he had not been laid in a hard bed, and pillowed on dying arms. He never knew any existence but that which he thus began, as it were, for the second time under Marjory's shadow. He had no surroundings but those that belonged to the natural level on which he was to spend his life.

Fanshawe remained in St. Andrews while all these steps were being taken. His conduct was quite in accordance with his character. He intended to go away daily, but every day found some pretext to detain him. He lingered, and was ready to aid in everything required, and bade himself begone at night, only to feel that to go was impossible every morning. People made a hundred comments on him. He was gibed at, gravely questioned, made the object of many a conjecture, but nothing moved him. He stayed through the Autumn, with now and then a divergence into the Highlands for a day's shooting; he saw the Autumn steal into Winter, and never budged. Mr. Charles became so used to him that he received the suggestion of his departure with indignation at last.

"Go away! why should he go away? Where could he be better?" Mr. Charles said; and did his best to teach him golf, and initiate him into all the delights of the place. It was Fanshawe who stood by Marjory in the disagreeable assault she sustained from Mrs. Charles, who drove into St. Andrews in the Pitcomlie carriage, and stormed so loudly against her husband's family, that the wanderers in the ruined Cathedral heard the sound through the open windows, and came gaping and wondering to listen.

Matilda denounced every kind of vengeance upon the heads of those who had got up this conspiracy against her, and were about to hunt her and her orphan boy from their home.

"But do not think you will get rid of me," she said. "I am not the outcast you think. Providence has given me another home, where I shall be able to watch and find you out when you are not thinking. Oh, don't imagine you are rid of me!"

Poor Johnnie Hepburn stood by during this objurgation, shrinking from Marjory's eye, looking on, now red with shame, now pale with distress, while his future wife made this exhibition of herself. He stood between the ideal he had worshipped all his life, and the real upon which he had fallen, poor fellow, breaking not his bones, but his heart, by the fall. He was too much cowed to say a word. And neither of the others said much; they allowed the young widow to drive off triumphant with the sense that she had humbled them all, and vindicated her superiority. "That must have done her a deal of good," Fanshawe said when it was over, "and it has not done you much harm."

"It has done me a great deal of harm," said Marjory, paling out of her flush of excitement, and looking ready to cry; and then after a while, she said softly, "Poor Johnnie!" These were not the words of a woman who had entertained any very elevated feeling for the man whom she thus pitied; but they were enough to make Fanshawe quite unhappy.

"Idiot!" he said to himself without any pity; and spent that evening mournfully by himself to the wonder of the Heriot household, and the consterna-

tion of Marjory, who felt that he had been her best support; and who had not an idea what he could mean by absenting himself on that particular evening when she was so grateful to him.

They were brought together also by another duty, not of an agreeable kind. Mrs. Charles gave her sister a summary dismissal when she herself left Pitcomlie. It was Spring when this occurred, and Matilda was to go to Edinburgh, her year of mourning being nearly out, to prepare for her second marriage. But Verna, whose courage and temper had both given way under the failure of all her hopes, protested so warmly and so injudiciously against this precipitate marriage, that there was a violent quarrel, and the weaker sister was turned out to find her way back to India, or where she pleased. She went to St. Andrews, not knowing why, and threw herself upon Marjory's compassion. She had nowhere to go to but India, where her father did not want her. Nobody in the world wanted poor Verna. While they were trying to arrange for her return voyage, she fell ill of a brain-fever, and lay between life and death for weeks. When she got better, somehow she had acquired a niche in the household of which she had intended to be the most active enemy. She stayed in her loneliness as Milly's governess, or in any other capacity that could be invented for her; and finally married Dr. Murray's successor, and made an admirable parish Minister's wife, interfering too much with the poor people, but gradually learning their character. She and Mrs. John Hepburn were sometimes friends—when the latter was in want of help; and sometimes enemies,

when Matilda felt well enough to be insolent; but Verna's vicinity made poor Johnnie's life less miserable, and his home less hopeless, than in her absence they could have been.

This, however, is an incursion into the future which we are scarcely warranted in making, seeing that the fate of the two principal persons of this history still remains unsettled. Fanshawe lingered at St. Andrews through all the Winter and Spring. He made himself of use to everybody, and was deeply ashamed of his own absolute uselessness. Never had he been so conscious of the good-for-nothing existence which he did not seem able to shake himself clear of. It closed his mouth in Marjory's presence. What could he say for himself? how could he recommend himself to her? He would go and sit by her, or walk by her side when permitted, silent, embarrassed; doing nothing to win her attention, wondering if she despised him, or if she pitied him, or if she thought him worth thinking of at all? His feelings grew exaggerated and unreal in the profound consciousness he had of his own helpless unimportance, and in his constant surmises as to what she thought of him, and the questions concerning him which must arise in her mind. One half of these questions, however, never arose in Marjory's mind at all, and the other half appeared to her in a different light, and affected her differently; but the man was in love and humble, and never divined this. He lingered on, hoping for he knew not what; that something might break the ice between them, that she might offer herself to him, or something else equally improbable. Marjory's

sentiments were of a very different character. She did not feel herself to stand on that vast pinnacle of superiority which was so visible to him; her eyes were not so clear as he supposed them. To be sure, he was not at all her ideal of what a man ought to be; but I am not sure that she liked him less on that account. Probably Marjory, like many other young women, supposed herself to prefer that glorious being of romance whom romantic girls dream of, whom they can look up to, upon whom they can hang in sweet but abject inferiority, and who is to them, as Mr. Trollope says, a god. I say probably she supposed that she would have liked this; but I doubt much whether she would have liked it; for men like gods seldom appear to the visual organs of any but very susceptible feminine adorers, after five-and-twenty, and Marjory had reached that ripe age. But I fear she liked Fanshawe all the better for not being a god. She liked him for the very qualities which he felt she must despise him for. To her the vague and unsettled character of his life appeared but dimly, while his generosities shone out very bright. All her good sense and discrimination failed her in this point, as such qualities invariably do just at the moment when they might be of practical use. In matters so closely concerning personal happiness they never are of the slightest use; as soon as the heart is touched, such poor bulwarks of the mind yield as if they were made of broken reeds. She saw nothing ignoble, nothing unworthy in the life full of so many kindly uses, of which Fanshawe thought with so much shame, yet felt himself incapable of changing.

"Most people come here for golf," she would say, when his long lingering was remarked. "Why should he not stay—for his own pleasure—if he likes it? Is golf such an elevating occupation?"

This was said, not because she despised golf, but because of him whom she felt herself bound to defend, and who had not even golf—who had only herself, for his excuse.

The way in which all this ended was as follows: Marjory had gone out to the Spindle on a bright Winter day to pay a farewell visit to that spot which had occupied so important a place in her past life. Who does not know the keen and radiant brightness of a sunny day in Winter, when there is no wind to chill the still air, no clouds upon the deepened blue, none of the languid softening of Summer, but every outline sharp, and every tint brought out by the radiant sun and clear atmosphere? The rocks unfolded all their glittering veins, all their ruddy stains of colour under the sunshine. There were no trees to keep the fact of decay before the spectator by means of fallen leaves and bare anatomy of branches. The sea was like a great blue mirror, except where the crisped surface, still, though ruffled, betrayed some breath of wandering air. The sails of the fishing boats rose brown out of this dazzling surface, and in the distance some far white ships glided like great sea-birds along the bright broad line of the horizon to which both sky and sea went out widening and paling. The sun was warm, and Marjory seated herself, for a few moments, on a dry rock from which the sea had long ebbed. This stillness was more intense

than it ever is on a Summer day—the brightness almost more intense too. She sat and thought of all that had passed there—of Isabell and her death-bed—of the strange way in which this corner of rocky beach had been thrust into her own story. She was disturbed and annoyed when she heard a step approaching, scattering the pebbles, and sounding through the Winter's stillness. She was still more disturbed, but perhaps not annoyed, when she saw that the intruder was Fanshawe. He was the only intruder whose presence she could have endured; and when she saw him, she rose and went to meet him, taking the path towards home, which somehow made the encounter less embarrassing. He turned and accompanied her It is a long walk, winding up and down by many a fold of the bold coast, now at the foot of the cliffs, now above—an endless walk to people who are embarrassed by finding themselves together; and yet not disagreeable—one of those opportunities of pleasant pain which few have the courage to avoid; and which may become, who knows, all pleasure, and no pain, by the chance of a sudden word.

"Do you know," said Fanshawe suddenly, after some vague conversation about nothing, "that I know what a poor wretch I am, Miss Heriot? If I was good for anything—if I was of the least consequence in the world, or knew how to make myself so, I should go away."

"Should you?" said Marjory; "I do not see the necessity. Do you know that I think you talk a great deal of nonsense on this point. You cannot expect me to agree with you, seeing what a friend

you have been to us; how much you have done for us ever since we knew you. You have been good for everything—"

"And yet," he said, "it is odd if you will think of it—that I have been of no real service whatsoever. I don't mean to say I had not the best intentions—but there is nothing so feeble as good intentions. About these Macgregors, for instance; they were found before I got back from my wild-goose chase. I meant well, but I did nothing."

"That is not the question," said Marjory loftily; "their coming was a mere accident. You did everything—the accident came in and balked you. I was half disappointed myself."

"Were you?" he said, looking at her with those melting, glowing eyes which betray secrets. And then he added quite abruptly: "The road is rough, will you take my arm?"

Marjory laughed. "I do not see how that follows," she said amused.

"No, it does not follow; nothing follows in life —except that the road is rough, you know, and facts count for something. They do count for something—not for much, perhaps you will say—"

"Indeed, I am not such an infidel; they count for a great deal," she said, and though she needed no support, she accepted it to give him pleasure. But such was the fantastical nature of the man that, after the first gleam of delight that came across him at the touch of her hand, his brow clouded over.

"How good you are, Miss Heriot! too good. You drive me to despair when you are kind to me.

Often, do you know, I have wanted to ask you whether, by any chance—people take odd fancies sometimes—you would have me, to try what you could make of me? and then you have been kind, and driven me to despair. It is no use, is it, telling you that I have been a greater fool than usual to-day? Do you know," he went on, holding her hand tightly in his arm, "if you would have had me, I think something might have come of me, perhaps—"

He looked at her so that she could not bear his eyes. It was a curious kind of love-tale; but not, I suppose, less embarrassing than another. She withdrew her hand from his arm with difficulty, and with a little impatience. "Mr. Fanshawe, you vex me when you say such things—of yourself."

Each word as she said it was lower than the preceding one; and the last two were quite inaudible to poor Fanshawe. He gave a huge sigh that came from the bottom of his heart. "Well!" he said, "I knew how it would be; I felt sure that was about what you would say. And it is quite right—I am not good enough to look at you, much less to hope. But, Miss Heriot, I am done for now, and I don't care what becomes of me. Don't be kind to me any more."

Marjory looked up, and saw, to her wonder, the darkness that had come over his face. There was no time to be lost in trifling. She put her hand within his arm again—she looked at him smiling. "But I will," she said.

"You will—what?"

The question was foolish—the answer unnecessary. So are many questions, and many answers at

that crisis of life. They got home somehow, and told the others what had happened. "But I have nothing," Fanshawe said ruefully when he recounted the matter to Mr. Charles.

"We must make some arrangement—some arrangement," said that troubled sage, with many puckers in his forehead. Anyhow, it was a way of solving the question of Marjory's marriage, and that was worth a sacrifice.

The Fanshawes are now settled at Pitcomlie, the guardians of the baby heir. The useless man has become the most useful of men in that work which so many useless men could shine in, the management of an estate. He has found what he can do, and does it. And Mr. Charles sits in his room in the old Tower, and has come to the second volume of the family history. It will be a long time before he comes to the entry of "Thomas Heriot, married June 16, 18—, to Isabell Jeffrey," nobody's daughter, which it goes to his very heart to think of. Perhaps he will not live long enough to be obliged to record that there was once an irregular marriage and a nameless wife among the Heriots; but in the meantime the others keep the name of poor Isabell always sacred; and her boy, after his long minority, will be the richest Heriot that has reigned for many a generation in the East Neuk of Fife.

THE END.

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